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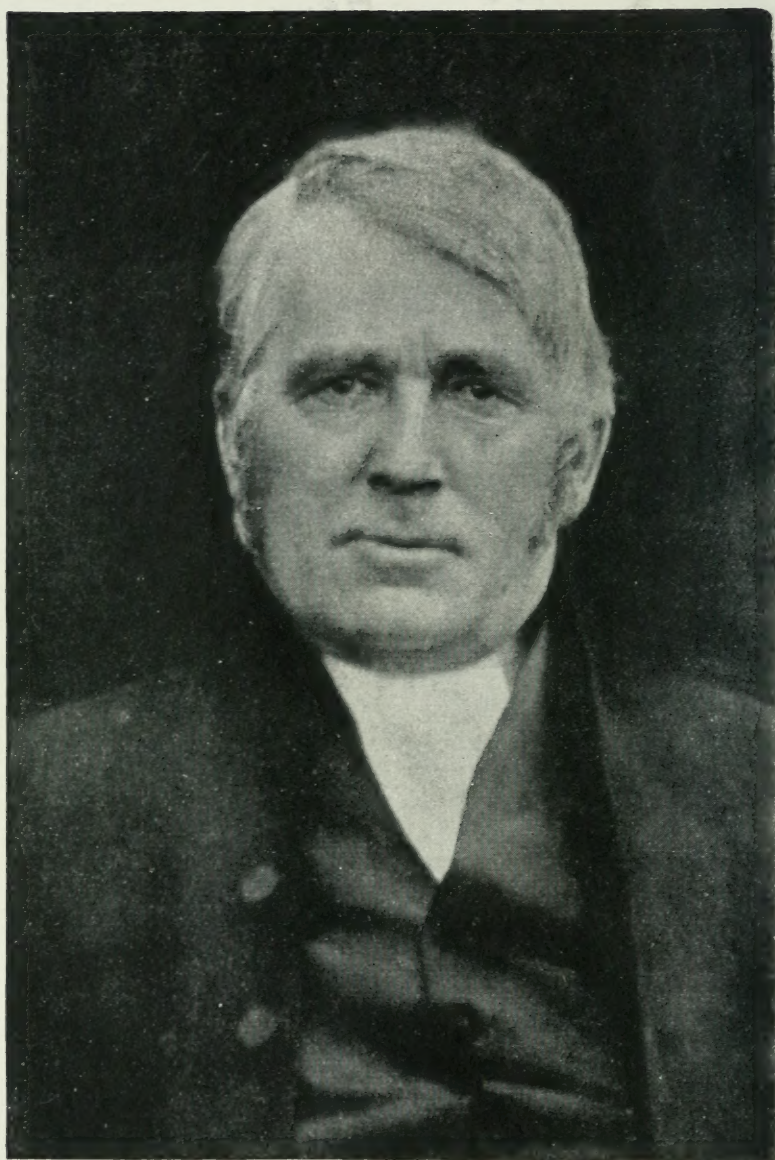


JOSEPH STURGE



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JOSEPH STURGE



# JOSEPH STURGE

*HIS LIFE AND WORK*

BY

STEPHEN HOBHOUSE



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## PREFACE

CONSIDERABLE attention has deservedly been paid by recent historical research to the political movement known as Chartism; and to any student of that subject the name of Joseph Sturge will probably be familiar, owing to the conspicuous share which he had in its development, during one of the most critical years of the agitation. When adequate histories have been written of the movements for the abolition of negro slavery and the promotion of international peace, we are confident that some recognition will be given to the no less important part played by Sturge in these other fields of spiritual enterprise. It is not, however, to be expected that a historical treatise should give any adequate characterisation of the personalities of even the more important of the many actors in the drama, which it is attempting to unfold to its readers. The endeavour to draw a life-like picture of one strong and admirable personality is my reason for writing the pages contained in the present volume.

Memories are transient; and, in an age that lives so much by the printed word, only a very few of them are handed down over an interval of sixty years. It was already possible for Herbert Spencer, in his Autobiography composed some twenty-five or more years ago, to write of Joseph Sturge's name as "scarcely known to the present generation," (adding, with characteristic irony, that, had he been a military adventurer, his memory would have been cherished by a grateful nation). Four poems of John Greenleaf Whittier preserve some record of Sturge's name and worth. His effigy in weather-beaten marble stands at the meeting-point of the Five Ways in the city of Birmingham. But



only few, probably, among the thousands who daily pass the statue, know anything about the man whom it represents.

The materials for this short biography were collected during the earlier months of 1914; the completion of my work was however interrupted by the outbreak of war in August of that year, and by the new claims of the critical times that followed. The experiences of the four momentous years, that intervened before I resumed my task in August last, have perhaps somewhat dimmed the freshness of that literary acquaintance with a bygone personality, which may come very close indeed to actual friendship; but they have strengthened my faith in the great principles to which Joseph Sturge devoted his career, and they have given me a clearer idea of the limitations of vision, under which he and his fellow-workers, like all reformers, laboured in their application of those principles to life and society. Many of the opinions which I have expressed in this book are doubtless matters of controversy; but that is inevitable in a work, which aims at being not merely a chronicle, but also in some measure an interpretation, of human actions.

The deficiencies which exist in the treatment of my subject must be attributed partly to want of skill on the side of the author, and partly to the paucity of the available material. Richard Cobden wrote of Joseph Sturge in 1864: "He was a doer and not a talker or writer; and he left few records of himself to illustrate the depth or intensity of his feelings, or the lofty motives that impelled him to a life of incessant labour in the cause of humanity." Most of the personal records, that existed in 1864, have since been destroyed, or have otherwise disappeared. The present volume was of necessity dependent for the greater portion of its material upon the *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge*, published in the year just mentioned, from the pen of Sturge's intimate friend Henry Richard, secretary of the London Peace Society. This bulky work of 622 pages forms an interesting, accurate, and in many ways admirable description of his life and times; but it has long been out of print, and its author was too near the events which he records,

and too devoted a fellow-worker with his hero, to be able to form a sufficiently detached judgment as to persons and events. Nevertheless, my indebtedness to Richard's Memoirs appears upon most of the pages of this book.

I have, fortunately, been able to supplement this chief source of information in several important ways. The most noteworthy of these additional sources has been the collection of original letters and other documents made by the late Charles Dickinson Sturge, nephew of Joseph Sturge. These papers—supplemented by his own personal recollections—were kindly made available to me by their owner, who died in 1915, at the advanced age of eighty-two. I am also much indebted in various ways to the present Joseph Sturge, son of the subject of this biography; and to Miss Magdalen Evans, niece of Henry Richard, who courteously placed at my disposal all that has survived of her uncle's diaries and political correspondence. I have made use of a good deal of material gathered from the files of contemporary newspapers. Many of Cobden's letters to Richard have recently been transcribed by J. A. Hobson in his study entitled *Richard Cobden: The International Man*; and to Mr. Hobson I am grateful for permission to quote a few short extracts that appear in his book, as well as for other assistance rendered to me. G. Currie Martin has kindly supplied me with information, that has recently come to light, as to the early history of the Adult School movement. Among other friends and acquaintances, to whom acknowledgments are due for help in the preparation of these pages for the press, I would mention in particular Ernest E. Taylor, Norman Penney, C. Edmund Maurice, and the secretaries of the Peace and Anti-slavery Societies, which are still active in support of the two causes that shared perhaps the innermost place in the warm heart of Joseph Sturge.

STEPHEN HOBHOUSE.

ENFIELD BUILDINGS, HOXTON.

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# JOSEPH STURGE

## CHAPTER I

### EARLY YEARS

JOSEPH STURGE was born on August 2, 1793, at an old farm-house in the parish of Elberton, some ten miles north of Bristol City and not far from the banks of the Severn. The times were full of evil omen for Europe; in the previous February England had been drawn into the continental alliance against revolutionary France, and during this autumn the young Bonaparte was fighting with success in Toulon against the English and Royalists the first of his many battles. But in those distant days, before the advent of railway and telegraph, war on the Continent probably touched hardly at all the life of a quiet Gloucestershire village. Farmer Sturge had the satisfaction of receiving better prices for his corn and his cattle, and in the silence of his little Quaker meeting he doubtless, after the manner of his sect, lifted up his heart in earnest prayer for the return of peace to the suffering nations.

Bristol had been a great and living centre of Quakerism in the days of George Fox, and before 1700 a considerable proportion of the inhabitants of this district of Gloucestershire seem to have been attached to the Religious Society of Friends. Through both his father, Joseph, and his mother, Mary Marshall, Joseph Sturge was descended from a line of sturdy yeomen and farmers, who were Friends from very early days.<sup>1</sup> His own character was in true keeping with the vigorous independence and the indomitable

<sup>1</sup> Whenever in this book ' Friend ' is printed with a capital F, it stands for the almost synonymous word Quaker.

adherence to religious principle that might be expected from such a stock.

Joseph was the fourth child among six boys and six girls, of whom all but one survived until middle life. He is described as having been 'a very healthy and lively infant, whom it was a pleasure to nurse.' Growing up among brothers and sisters, not far separated in age, with kindly parents and in the midst of a healthy and beautiful country, his childhood was a natural and happy one. In these early years he laid the foundation of a robustness of constitution, bodily and mental, that enabled him in later life to work with such continuous and amazing vigour for every kind of good cause in addition to his own business. There is no record of any serious illness before he reached the age of sixty-one, when the strain and horror of the Crimean War broke down his strength.

The Sturge children lived a happy, open-air life, roaming at will through the meadows and woodlands that surrounded their home. They had been given a donkey carriage, which could also be used as a boat, for paddling through the dykes separating the lowland fields. There were few lessons and but little constraint, although their after life of usefulness seems to indicate that their moral training had not been neglected. Their parents possessed indeed no special culture or originality, but were affectionate, simple-minded folk, endowed with a good measure of the Christian virtues. The boy Joseph was also much in the company of his grandfather Marshall, a Warwickshire farmer, at whose farm near Alcester he spent about three years, taking his meals, after the patriarchal fashion that still survived, with the family and servants, men and women, all sitting together at the kitchen table. His life here had even more freedom than at home, and he overflowed with healthy animal spirits, as every normal child should do, having a measure too of the mischief and petty faults which are natural in our early years. He was especially fond of plunging through hedges and climbing trees, with such disastrous results to his clothing that his

grandfather playfully threatened to put him into *tin-breeches*. Birds'-nesting was a favourite pursuit, yet he lived to be penitent for this amusement, as well as for the shooting and coursing of his early manhood, coming to see, like Woolman and Mazzini, the wrongfulness, for purposes of sport, of causing pain to any of God's creatures.

The seriousness of Joseph Sturge in later life did not prevent him from smiling at his boyish pranks, and he used to recount to his children with glee how he imposed upon his grandfather, who, at the approach of the cherry harvest, had bidden him rise at dawn to scare away the birds from the fruit. The ingenious Joseph attached a long string to the bell hung up among the trees, and, by bringing the end into his bedroom, he managed to keep up an intermittent ringing, while still remaining in bed. A more serious fault was the securing from the landlady of the Fish Inn, in conjunction with a companion, of change in coppers for a sixpenny piece, which they knew to be bad. Nearly sixty years after, when visiting his childish haunts with his own children, he remembered the error, and made atonement a hundredfold by confessing his sin to the granddaughter of the landlady, and presenting her with a liberal gift.

At ten years of age his three years' visit to his grandfather came to an end. The family had meanwhile moved to another farm in the adjoining parish of Olveston,<sup>1</sup> and Joseph was soon after sent, for the first time, to school. Probably his mother had already taught him to read at home, but in any case his parents did not attach great value to a school education, for his school life only lasted four years, ending when he was fourteen. Of this period the first year was spent at a day school in Thornbury, three miles from his home; during the other three years he boarded at a private school kept by a Quaker at Sidcot, Somerset (where the present public Friends' School was

<sup>1</sup> Written *Oldstone* in the seventeenth century. Here George Fox and his newly-married wife parted 'each to our several service' in 1669.



shortly afterwards founded). Considering that at these schools he can hardly have done more than obtain a very rudimentary education, his literary and financial capabilities in later years are remarkable. But he often lamented, when in the midst of his international labours, that he had never learnt a foreign language. A brave and athletic boy, he took the lead among his schoolfellows outside the classroom. True to his Quaker upbringing, he made a solemn resolution never to fight. The sequel shall be told in his own words. 'Among a number of boys,' he wrote later, 'one's temper is not unfrequently tried, and, as mine was of a rather peppery nature, I found it difficult to keep my resolution; and in one or two instances avoided direct boxing only by closing with my antagonist and throwing him on the ground.'

At the age of fourteen, that is in 1807, he finally left school, and for the next seven years, up to the age of twenty-one, he lived the open-air life of a farmer's son destined to step into his father's shoes. That was the cherished wish of the Quaker yeoman for his second son, and, to this end, he initiated him into all the varied duties of the profession, taking him to fairs and markets, and sending him for months together to friends who would teach him the art of growing corn. Joseph was even started in control of a small farm a couple of miles nearer to the Severn than his home. All through these years of adolescence he retained the same exuberance of spirits, delighting in open-air sports, especially in riding, in which he was bold to the verge of recklessness. At the same time he made efforts to continue his scanty education by joining a Reading Society, which circulated books, and a so-called 'Endeavour Society' formed among some of the young Quakers of Bristol for studying 'such branches of literature and the fine arts as are sanctioned by the Society of Friends.' Astronomy seems to have been Joseph's favourite study, and the quotations from poetry that sometimes occur in his later letters show that, though never a wide reader, he learnt to enjoy good literature. At any rate it

circulated in the family, for his sisters Sophia and Priscilla write of reading Southey, Cowper, *The Heart of Midlothian*, and even 'the last poems of Lord Byron.' And his younger brother John, when in his teens, reads with enjoyment Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, the *Histories* of Gibbon and Hume, the *Edinburgh Review*, and Buffon's *Natural History*.

It is evident that Joseph Sturge was restless at the thought of an occupation that had so little scope, as had a farmer's, for touching the great arteries of national life; and at the age of twenty-one, upon receiving quite unexpectedly an offer of a business partnership, he decided to join a Quaker friend of his, H. F. Cotterell by name, as corn-factor at Bewdley, a small town on the Severn in Worcestershire. Accordingly in the summer of 1814 he bade farewell to the Olveston home and the scenes of his childhood. The decision was probably a blow to his father, but we have no record of the farmer's feelings. And Joseph himself, though he was obtaining the promise of a career of wider experience, for which his eager spirit longed, felt the parting from home a sore trial. He writes of his grief to his brother John, saying how he was about 'to embark on the ocean of life without any pilot to assist me.' And in another letter he promised that 'neither time nor distance will prevent him from continuing an affectionate son and brother.' Bewdley was destined to be his headquarters for some eight years, up to his removal to Birmingham in 1822; and those years of distress and unsettlement, when Britain was reaping the aftermath of the Great War, must have left deep marks on the young man's consciousness, and done much to direct him into the paths of public service which he entered later on. At first he boarded with the Cotterells, but only for a few months. In the year of Waterloo he moved to a home of his own, 'a dull barn of a house' without a garden. But he was happier here, more especially since his beloved sister Sophia came to keep house for him. In 1817 his father died and, with a heartbroken mother and seven younger brothers and



sisters, heavy responsibilities devolved upon Joseph. The partnership with Cotterell was abandoned, and his brother Charles was taken instead into the corn business; the next year a larger house was secured, where the family could be accommodated. The widowed mother only survived until 1819, and Joseph then assumed still more the place of parent and counsellor. His unselfish thought and tender affection, his wisdom and influence as peacemaker were conspicuous within the household. In his case, unlike that of some philanthropists and saints, it might be said with perfect truth that charity began at home. And from the first too it overflowed outside the inner circle. In a 'proposed plan of life' which he wrote out when about twenty-two, he determined, among much else that was excellent, 'to sacrifice many of my own comforts rather than not be able to entertain a friend or relation with pleasure, and give him a cordial welcome.' In these Bewdley years too his religious and philanthropic interests were rapidly expanding. Yet all the time the uncertainties of the corn trade required his utmost efforts, and he had to contend more than once with disastrous business losses. He and his two brothers, Thomas and Charles, are described as 'broad-shouldered muscular men, capable of great exertion, but decidedly indifferent as to their outward aspect.' His life at this time is thus pictured by Thomas Pumphrey, an intimate friend:

'His industry was exceeded by few, and his power of endurance was scarcely less remarkable. Bewdley Meeting was united to Worcester as a Preparative Meeting,<sup>1</sup> and I have known him, at a time of great feverish excitement in the corn trade, come over to Worcester on a first-day morning and attend the Preparative Meeting; take the mail at night, and travel (on the old coaching system) an eleven or twelve hours' journey to London; attend Mark Lane market on second-day, proceed by that night's coach to Bristol; attend market there on third-day, travel thence to Gloucester, and, reaching there late at night, obtain a few hours' rest before proceeding sixteen miles to Ross to attend his Quarterly Meeting<sup>1</sup> on

<sup>1</sup> Meetings for worship and church affairs. (See p. 8.)

fourth-day; after which he again mounted the coach, and undertook another long journey to Liverpool.'

Joseph Sturge was a man who dwelt much with the unseen, and whose conduct was guided to a very large degree by the form of Christian faith which he both professed and practised. His removal, when nearing his thirtieth year, from Bewdley to the busy metropolis of the Midlands was a landmark in his career. It seems therefore desirable at this point to endeavour to reconstruct, from the somewhat scanty records available, his religious development during these formative years, as well as something of the religious atmosphere in which he grew up.

The growth and overflowing missionary enterprise of the Society of Friends in the seventeenth century had gradually, during the century that followed, settled down into a devout but rather formal quietism. Friends were too much occupied with their testimonies against ritual, the paid ministry, and worldliness of all kinds—protests which had indeed been healthy enough when they had a burning message of love to impart, but which, as zeal died down, lapsed into insufficient negations. The meetings steadily decreased in numbers, owing chiefly to the practice of disowning members for many kinds of irregularities, including especially that of 'marrying before a priest,' which was the only authorised way of marrying a person not in membership with the Society. The ill-proportioned exaltation of the central Quaker doctrine of the 'Inner Light' tended to depreciate religious education, and even the reading of the Bible was but little practised. The utterances that broke the long silences of the weekly meetings for worship were usually of a prophetic and rather incoherent kind. Small country meetings, like those at Olveston and Bewdley, seem to have been often held in complete silence, the inflow of new ideas only coming in from time to time, when the gathering was visited by a travelling minister, who, in Quaker language, was under a religious concern to visit the meetings in some particular district. Otherwise the outward side of Church life was



maintained then, as now, by the recurrent Preparative, Monthly, Quarterly, and Yearly Meetings, which regulated the affairs and discipline of the Society over smaller and wider groups of Friends. Still, in comparison with the rest of the community, a remarkably high standard of Christian morality,—of purity of life, of charity towards neighbours, and of scrupulous honesty in business persisted from one Quaker generation to another. There were true saints to be found in the Society, and a few powerful preachers. Rejecting altogether the outward observance of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, the Friends taught their children to find in silent worship and in the daily round true sacraments by which the Spirit of Christ found its way into their lives. Many, who in later life left or were driven out of the Quaker fold, were thankful to the end for the sense of God's presence and of Christian duty that had wrapped them about in childhood and adolescence.

It was in this kind of religious environment that the Sturges of Olveston grew up, though the children enjoyed a wholesome open-air freedom that must have been unusual in Quaker households. The extant letters of Joseph Sturge's parents, brothers, sisters, and relatives during the first twenty years of the century show a type of worthy, domestic, affectionate country folk, occupied mainly with their farming, their ailments, births, marriages, and deaths, and with some aspirations to literary culture. There is plenty of the language of affection, but a marked reticence in speaking of God or of religion. They were evidently brought up not to use the Divine name too freely. No one in the family seems to have been a minister of the Society or to have had religious 'concerns'; and in one letter Joseph's sister Sophia expresses her strong objection to a visiting Friend who dwelt incessantly on sacred and religious subjects. The special Quaker testimonies, such as those of the 'plain' language ('thee' and 'thy') and the 'plain' dress, were however practised and emphasised. We find the widowed mother writing to Charles begging him 'never to use any other than the plain language,' and

so follow the example of his father, 'who was not ashamed of Christ and His Word.' And Joseph himself urges upon another brother that 'to deviate from any of those peculiarities that belong to our profession weakens us as Christians, and we may perhaps be avoiding the only means *we* have of proving our dedication to Him, obedience to whose Will is the intent of our creation.' In their letters God is nearly always referred to as 'Infinite Wisdom,' 'Divine Grace,' or 'Providence,' and usually in connection with His control of outward events, especially of the visitations of sickness and death. There is a background of melancholy remembrance of the frequency of these saddening events; though ten of Joseph's eleven brothers and sisters survived, one member or other of the family is constantly sick, many children of relatives die in infancy, and there are frequent references to the vanity of all 'sublunary' things. There is a sense of longing for a better world and of resignation under the dispensations of Providence, combined with a deep feeling of human sinfulness and of the exalted nature of the standard of Christian perfection.

The decline among Friends of missionary enthusiasm, which characterised most of the eighteenth century, seems to have continued into the first decade of the nineteenth, and then to have been gradually arrested, largely through the indefatigable labours of a few gifted ministers, of whom the chief were perhaps William Forster, the Frenchman Stephen Grellet, and Joseph John Gurney, brother to Elizabeth Fry. These men refreshed the religious life of the Society with the ardent spirit of the contemporary evangelical movement, the fruit of Wesley's Methodism, represented in the Church of England by gifted leaders like Wilberforce and Buxton. The movement had great weaknesses, it exalted dogmas and the letter of the Bible at the expense of the inward mysticism of love, and its philanthropy was not democratic, but patronising. But it brought an indispensable revival to the slumbering Quakerism of the time, gave Friends a better knowledge of the



Bible and of the life of Christ; and introduced into a body that had lost missionary fervour and looked upon any share in politics as undesirable 'creaturely activity,' a zeal for social reforms, such as the education and relief of the poor, the improvement of prisons, and, above all, the abolition of negro slavery.

Joseph Sturge has left it on record that it was at the age of about fourteen, when he had finally left school, that he first came 'under strong religious impressions, and was really desirous to act consistently with the will of Him who created me for His glory.' But he had a chequered struggle with the usual temptations of vigorous youth, amongst which an uncertain temper, and a painful jealousy of what he considered the partiality of his parents for some of their other children, seem to have been for some years the chief.

He probably learnt from quite an early age to benefit morally and spiritually from the regular attendance of the family at the quiet, unadorned Meeting House, where without priest, or rite, or book, and with only occasional outpourings of exhortation or prayer, they strove to open their hearts in the silence to communion with the Spirit of the Unseen.

The nearest approach to any epoch in his life which might be described as 'conversion' was in 1812 at the age of twenty, when some eloquent ministers of the Society visited the district. One of these was William Forster, brother-in-law to 'anti-slavery Buxton' and father of the Liberal statesman to whom we owe largely the Education Act of 1870. He was a man who combined to a remarkable degree the mystical and evangelical types of Christianity. He preached a very definite doctrine of the Atonement—of the indispensable need for a 'personal interest in Christ's atoning sacrifice'; yet he lived too by the guidance of the Spirit, his favourite theme was the Divine love for man, rather than the wrath of God, and he was continually under a deep sense of burden and suffering for the evils of the world, especially as regards war and slavery. We are



told that when he stood in the 'Ministers' gallery,' addressing the quiet assembly before him, his countenance was almost heavenly, beaming with an inner light that seemed absolutely to transfigure the homely features.

William Forster's personality and preaching left permanent marks upon Joseph Sturge, who at the time accompanied him to a number of his religious meetings. Right up to Forster's death, in 1854, Joseph retained a most reverent admiration for this good man, consulted him on Anti-slavery and other matters, and to a great extent adopted his views on Christian doctrine. But, though Joseph at first aspired to do so, he did not follow his friend as a religious preacher. He seems throughout life to have regarded himself as unworthy to do this, and to have felt no irresistible movings of the Spirit to break the silence of the Quaker meeting. And probably too in his heart he revered practical righteousness before religious zeal. In any case William Forster's call to the service of Christ's Kingdom soon bore some fruit, for in the year after his visit Joseph had become secretary of the Thornbury branch of the British and Foreign Bible Society (founded in London in 1804) and went about collecting subscriptions and seeing who were in want of Bibles, of which at that time there was a great scarcity. We should also no doubt have found him already engaged in Anti-slavery propaganda, but for the fact that, during the fifteen years preceding 1823, that movement was in a very disorganised condition. But the London Peace Society had been founded in 1816, and in 1818 Joseph Sturge was the chief instrument in starting a branch of it at Worcester, whither he rode regularly over the fourteen miles from his Bewdley home to attend committee meetings. It was at Bewdley, in the intervals of his exciting commercial pursuits, that he began to realise what a reservoir of strength for the active life can be gained by the regular practice of silent worship. In an extant letter his sister Priscilla describes 'Meeting' as the time 'when we go to meet our best Friend, and to be taught of our ablest Instructor.' Yet she had

cause apparently gently to reproach her brother Charles for showing signs of restlessness in the silent gathering after the mail-coach had been heard to rumble into the town! No doubt it cost Joseph also many a struggle, especially at such times as the success or failure of his corn purchases was in the balance, to shake off a similar disquietude and fix his heart on God and His service alone. He writes in these Bewdley days to a favourite cousin that he 'finds the dew of Heaven wanting,' and that 'the world seems to have entangled me by its various secret and adamantine chains, even when I may be favoured to see in degree through the vanity of all it has to give, of which the enjoyment is incompatible with the dictates of true Christianity.' Yet his constant humility, and his equally constant reliance upon Divine grace to keep him in the path of Truth stood him in good stead. With what large measure of success the following chapters attempt to show.

## CHAPTER II

## LIFE IN BIRMINGHAM

THE great town, which from 1822 until the day of his death was to be Joseph Sturge's chosen abode, was distinguished from other British examples of these distressing monuments of chaotic commercialism in three special ways that affect this biography. Industrially, it was the great centre for the manufacture of armaments—firearms, swords, and cutlasses; politically, it had become the headquarters of the movement for democratic reform; and, in the sphere of religious organisation, it was one of the chief homes of Nonconformity in Great Britain. Among all its various denominations, the little Quaker community seems to have acquired, by the sterling character of some of its members, an influence out of all proportion to its size. There was only one Meeting House, with an attendance on 'First-Day' mornings of about three hundred persons. Any share in constructive or aggressive politics, whether Radical or Tory, was as much discouraged in the Birmingham group of the Society of Friends during the first half of the last century, as it was among the Friends in other places. One link, however, with political Nonconformity was supplied by the traditional Quaker testimony against 'priests' demands,' that is, church rates and tithes. The imposition of a compulsory church rate was only legally abolished in 1868; but in many districts the Nonconformists and their allies were able to get rid of the rate by outvoting their Anglican oppressors at the Parishioners' Meeting. This was the case in Birmingham in 1832, and it may well be imagined that in the years immediately preceding this date the church rate question was a burning one. In this struggle Joseph Sturge took a leading part; like many others he was a



'passive resister,' and lost one or more of his pigs by distraint in consequence. At the time of his arrival in Birmingham many of his Society were among the wealthiest citizens of the town, the banking interest being largely in their hands. There is a story told how Joseph, when standing outside the Meeting House in Bull Street, heard a passer-by count the carriages and pairs waiting at the doors—"One, two, three, four, five, six, look at the self-denying Quakers!" As might be expected, the bankers and others liked to keep on good terms with the governing class, and most of them paid their tithes and rates without demur. About the year 1824 the stricter Friends, among whom was Joseph Sturge, took the matter up, and the wealthy temporisers were in consequence 'disowned,' that is, excluded from membership.

By this purging process the Birmingham Meeting of the Society is said to have largely altered its character. The chief influence was now with the shopkeepers; and though many of these, like the Sturges, in the course of the next thirty years gradually accumulated wealth, and, unlike them, grew laxer in religious practice, yet a standard of strict and somewhat narrow zeal, which had both its good and its bad points, predominated, and made Birmingham one of the most conservative centres of Quakerism in England. The 'plain dress,' adopted not because it was less expensive than the fashion of the day—it was often a good deal more expensive—but as a protest against the frivolity of constant change, was the rule up to about 1855. Its chief characteristics were the bonnets of the women and the collarless coats and broad-brimmed beaver hats of the men. Joseph Sturge wore the plain dress until the day of his death. In colour, it was seldom black; the Sturges are said to have usually worn brown cloth.

The records of the Birmingham Friends indicate a slumbering church life. Disownments occur nearly every month, for very varied offences—marriage before a priest (that is, with a person not in membership), dishonesty, failing in business, enlisting in the army, keeping a public-

house. On the other hand, some persons are admitted as members by conviction. The Sunday meetings were not often brightened by inspired preaching, but their gathered silence afforded refreshment to many tired spirits. And the regular mid-week meeting must have been a wholesome, steadying influence. Every Wednesday morning the Quaker shopkeepers put up their shutters and walked off to the Meeting House, risking the probable loss of business opportunities for the sake of a quiet hour of communion with God and their own hearts. A very strict and, to the modern mind, unwise attitude was taken up in these years towards amusements, with little or no discrimination. Every year the local body had to answer a 'query' as to whether their members had been faithful in avoiding attendance at 'vain sports and places of diversion.' Musical entertainments too were sternly discountenanced, under the mistaken idea that music was a profane and even demoralising waste of time. As late as 1854 the Birmingham Elders called a special meeting to protest against a display of fireworks in which some of the younger members were preparing to indulge. In this case they did not have the support of the majority, though Joseph Sturge himself had his doubts about the exhibition. Here too we may mention a series of episodes in his career, which took place between the years 1829 and 1834. He was at the time one of the commissioners who were responsible for the erection of the new Town Hall. It had been decided to lend this building on special occasions for the holding of oratorios in aid of the General Hospital, in connection with the well-known Triennial Musical Festivals. In conjunction with other religious persons and backed no doubt by the strong feeling of the Quaker community, Joseph Sturge felt it his duty to make a number of outspoken protests, involving the resignation of his civic office, against what he considered as the debasing of a solemn religious theme by making it subsidiary to a fashionable musical entertainment, at which some, at least, of the performers were persons of irreligious and of questionable moral character.



However unfortunate the narrow outlook of the Friends may have been—and it undoubtedly drove many promising spirits out of the Society—it apparently helped the more firmly rooted members to find outlets for their energy in paths of usefulness and culture. The Friends' Reading Society was founded in 1826, and the library, lectures, and social life which it provided were a great blessing. Movements of national scope and importance were fortunately beginning to appear above the Quaker horizon. The Anti-slavery agitation in the twenties, the Temperance crusade in the thirties, and in the forties the opening of the 'Adult School' afforded much-needed opportunities for the service of others. In all these three movements Joseph Sturge took a leading part, and it was largely owing to their vitalising force that the Society of Friends did not sink into extinction. 'More delightful society than a cultivated Quaker family cannot be found; their truthfulness, genuineness, and simplicity of character, albeit not wanting, at proper times, a shrewd dash of worldly wisdom, are very refreshing.' So wrote Mrs. Beecher Stowe, the American authoress, on her visit to England in 1853, and circumstances point to these words being a tolerably true description of what might be found among many members of the Birmingham Meeting.

Joseph Sturge's career during the latter half of his life was like a piece of finely woven stuff, in which a number of conspicuous strands cross and re-cross one another in bewildering variety. The chief of these threads are represented by his four engrossing activities—the abolition of slavery, franchise reform, international peace, and his business as a corn merchant. It has been thought best, in this short memoir, to treat each of these important subjects in separate chapters; indeed a successful chronological narrative would have been almost impossible. It is therefore desirable at this point to supplement the foregoing sketch, of what we may call the denominational environment of Joseph Sturge, by tracing the outline of his domestic life until towards the close of his days.

Some three years after his arrival in Birmingham in 1822 Joseph Sturge built himself the comfortable house in Wheeley's Road, which was, as long as he lived, his own home and the scene of much hospitality to others. His favourite sister Sophia had followed him from Bewdley and continued to be his devoted housekeeper for full thirty years, with the exception of the brief ten months of his first marriage. We are told that Joseph had more than once had earlier intentions of taking unto himself a wife; but it was not until 1834, in his forty-first year, that he found the right partner, and was duly married to Eliza Cropper of Liverpool before the silently-gathered Friends after the solemn, priestless manner customary in the Society. Eliza's father James Cropper, merchant and philanthropist, was one of the most able and respected Quakers of the time, and foremost among the leaders of the English Anti-slavery movement. In this sphere Joseph had been a disciple who ended by outrunning his master; a regular and intimate correspondence was carried on between them from about 1825 onwards. Eliza was the confidante of her father in his labours, and therefore well fitted to give her husband intellectual as well as spiritual comradeship. Their married life began as a dream of happiness, but within ten months the young wife was dead, together with the child to which she had given birth. The devoted husband was stunned by the blow, and the effect of it was to detach his deepest personal affections and hopes more than ever from this world and to fix them upon the unseen Heaven of faith. His loss was sweetened by the assurance of his wife's happiness and by the tender consolations of his sister and those of his father-in-law, whose robust faith lifted him above the natural sorrow for the loss of an only daughter. Joseph himself, writing to Sophia on the first anniversary of the tragedy, expresses the hope that his wife Eliza and his sister Priscilla (whom he lost about the same time) might have been appointed ministering spirits to watch over those whom they had left behind on earth. He adds: 'It is a cause for thankfulness that the selfishness



of sorrow, for what has been taken away, has not been permitted to destroy an interest in and sympathy for the sufferings of others.'

Sophia resumed her place as guardian of her brother's home with more devotion than ever. During the ten years that remained to her, she relieved him of domestic cares, and watched over his stormy public career with wise judgment. A delicate woman—she died of consumption—with a restless, ailing temperament, she yet overcame her disabilities, so as to be invaluable to her brother and beloved and admired among a wide circle. She was passionately attached to Joseph, and identified herself with his plans and life. Most remarkable indeed is the way in which we find this pious and retiring Quakeress encouraging her brother to persevere in his support of the revolutionary objects of the Chartists in the face of the hostility or disapproval of almost all the members of their religious Society. Thus she writes to a friend on this subject:—

'I have an unshaken conviction that the cause is righteous, and whilst it is the reproach of all men, there seems less to fear for its advocates; a season of popularity, should *that* ever arrive, would be the time of danger.'

Words like these show that Sophia was of a similar mettle to her intrepid brother. And we cannot over-estimate the loss which it must have been to both his private and his public life, when she in her turn was taken from him in the summer of 1845. He writes 'how the world appears a wilderness without her,' and that 'He who wept at the grave of Lazarus will, I trust, pity my weakness.' Still his strong courage soon reasserted itself. The poet Whittier too, in the well-known verses entitled 'To my Friend, on the Death of his Sister,' presented him with a beautiful tribute of consolation, as well as with an inspiration to renewed service.

'With silence only as their benediction,  
     God's angels come  
 Where, in the shadow of a great affliction,  
     The soul sits dumb!

Yet, would I say what thy own heart approveth:  
Our Father's will,  
Calling to Him the dear one whom He loveth,  
Is mercy still.

Not upon thee or thine the solemn angel  
Hath evil wrought:  
Her funeral anthem is a glad evangel,—  
The good die not!

God calls our loved ones, but we lose not wholly  
What He hath given;  
They live on earth, in thought and deed, as truly  
As in His heaven.

Up, then, my brother! Lo, the fields of harvest  
Lie white in view!  
She lives and loves thee, and the God thou servest  
To both is true.

Thrust in thy sickle! England's toilworn peasants  
Thy call abide;  
And she thou mourn'st, a pure and holy presence,  
Shall glean beside!'

After a lonely interval of sixteen months a kindly Providence brought yet another good woman to share his hearth and home. This was Hannah, daughter of Barnard Dickinson, a man well known through the length and breadth of Quakerdom as a ministering Friend of the old style. The gifts of his second wife were domestic rather than in the line of public interests. In the course of time their home was gladdened by the arrival of five little children, dearly loved by their father, who lived to see the eldest of them reach the age of twelve.

A curious parallel may be noticed between the outstanding experiences in middle-life of the friends Joseph Sturge and John Bright, the two pioneers, as far as Quakers are concerned, in the field of party politics. Both lost a young wife after a very brief union. To both the widowed years that intervened between first and second marriage



were the stormiest of their career; and both men during this period were blessed and liberated by having a brother who conducted their business and a sister who kept house for them. Both finally entered, within nine months of each other, into a second married union that proved happy and enduring.

We may fitly leave for the present the domestic side of Joseph Sturge's life, by transcribing the following extract from some notes made in 1909 by his last surviving niece:—

'My memory of him begins in 1832, and, with very little exception, each year of my life comprised a long visit to what was made to me almost a second home. My uncle was from earliest childhood the example of a really good man; and if in life I have been able to approve the things that are excellent, I feel I owe it greatly to the privilege of knowing him. He seemed to me always to say the right thing in the right way, and if he had spoken at all hardly of any one, we almost always heard him afterwards qualify the censure by saying something in their favour, or at least by some reference to their early disadvantages which made it difficult for them to receive the truth. Very seldom would breakfast pass without some plan for giving help to some one in need of it, either temporally or spiritually, plans into which his sister Sophia entered warmly. Sometimes by her greater caution she probably helped his judgment. During some of my visits, my uncles John and Edmund shared the home, and in the midst of their busy lives my aunt Sophia managed to secure half an hour for reading aloud after the mid-day meal.'

## CHAPTER III

## THE CORN MERCHANT

IF the religious environment described at the beginning of the last chapter was a rather unpromising one for a social reformer,—though it may be doubted whether any other religious denomination could have provided better influences,—Joseph Sturge's professional occupation as buyer and seller of corn on a large scale was hardly in itself conducive to the development of Christian altruism. In order to obtain a true view of his life, and to realise the difficulties with which he had to contend, it is necessary to have some idea of the business conducted by the firm of Joseph and Charles Sturge. In the early years at Bewdley the two brothers had comparatively small transactions in Midland corn. Dealings in Irish grain came later, and then foreign operations, which made it desirable to move to Birmingham as a centre for distribution, and to Gloucester as a centre of import and warehousing; there was also an office at Bristol. The eldest brother, Thomas Sturge, acted as agent for the firm at Gloucester. The opening up, by private enterprise, of new foreign sources of food supply—often in remote regions—for the needs of half-starved England was a most necessary work. From the first too the business of the firm, like the corn trade in general, was of a highly speculative and uncertain nature. This was especially the case before the abolition (in the forties) of the taxes on foreign corn; so long as these were retained, the price of grain depended upon the character of the British harvest, and therefore fluctuated to a great degree in accordance with the weather. To buy largely in a cheap market, in the uncertain hope of selling in a dearer

one, is a risky and, to many men, a somewhat demoralising occupation. In spite of free trade in corn the speculative character of the business persisted. Sometimes big profits (up to £10,000 in the year) were realised, while, in 1851, Joseph Sturge estimated that sums amounting to £150,000 had been lost through 'imprudence' during the preceding twenty years.

William Cobbett, the brilliant Radical journalist and demagogue of the early nineteenth century, was, for very mixed reasons, a bitter enemy of the Quakers, and especially of James Cropper, Joseph Sturge's father-in-law, also a dealer in corn.<sup>1</sup> Cobbett assumes that the corn trade was mainly in Quaker hands, and in his famous *Rural Rides*, written in the twenties, whenever he records the spoiling of the harvest by rain, he ironically describes the Quakers in Mark Lane Market as rubbing their hands with glee at the profits they expected from the increased price of corn. There is much malice in Cobbett's attacks, but, it must be admitted, some truth; and Sturge, if he ever looked into these passages, must have felt the sting in them. For there is evidence in his correspondence that he was inwardly distressed at being in a position in which, as human nature is constituted, he could sometimes hardly avoid wishing for unfavourable weather. It was doubtless the longing to be delivered from this temptation, as well as a desire to moralise the whole trade, that inspired Sturge to give (as we shall find later) his active support to the Anti-Corn-Law League.

It is probable that, if Sturge had devoted his chief energies to commerce instead of to his public interests, he would have made his business a great success and grown very rich. As it was, the conduct of the firm was left in large part to the younger brother, who, though willing enough to free the hands of his partner for the beneficent work in which he himself fully sympathised, had much less com-

<sup>1</sup> Cobbett's personal grudge was due to Cropper's refusal to give Cobbett a passage in one of his ships, because he (Cobbett) had with him Tom Paine's bones, which he was transporting from America to England.



mercial insight and too sanguine a disposition. It is said that the experienced judgment of Joseph had attained, in regard to the chances and changes of the market, to 'something like a prophetic strain.' Nevertheless, his conviction of the vanity of riches and the harassing character of the business appear to have robbed him of any enjoyment which success might be supposed to give. There was continual worry about the financial solvency of the firm, as to matters of difference between the two brothers, and regarding the morality of the speculative transactions that took place. This state of mind is reflected in a series of letters that survive from the concluding twenty years of his life. These documents show Joseph reproaching himself for entering carelessly upon 'improper and dangerous' speculations, which were probably due more to his brother's impulsive temperament than to his own wishes; and betraying, at the same time, a tender solicitude lest the spiritual and moral growth of Charles should be damaged by undue devotion to trading. 'If there be truth in revelation,' he writes, 'thou and I have far too anxiously followed the pursuits of business.' Again, in 1849, he owns to 'such a strong impression of the blamable character of many of our transactions in past times, especially in regard to our great imprudence and the facilities that we have given to others to run risks which neither Christian principle nor strict justice would warrant,' that he wonders why ere then they had not been punished by the ruin of their business. He laments that, in spite of good resolutions, the force of habit has kept them in the same speculative ways. More than once during these later years Joseph writes as if he were on the point of retiring from business, and were only deterred by the fear of exposing himself to worse temptations in an 'untried path' and of leaving his less experienced brother in the lurch.

To most of his contemporaries Joseph Sturge appeared as a shining example of the ideal Christian merchant; and it must not be supposed that these passages in his letters indicate any practices which were not in harmony



with the accepted standards of the corn trade at the time. The expressions which he used are rather the mark of an extraordinarily sensitive conscience, combined with an exaggerated capacity for self-reproach and for dwelling on the vanity of business concerns, in view, as he often emphasised in his letters, of the nearness of death and judgment. Towards the close of his life (he died in 1859) this moral sensitiveness seems to have increased. At the London Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends<sup>1</sup> in both 1857 and 1858, he brought under notice the great responsibility that devolves upon Friends both as regards the acquisition and the disposal of wealth. And we appear to get his considered judgment in a letter of advice written shortly before his death to a nephew, who was employed in the office of the firm. 'The corn trade,' he writes, 'is attended with its full share of difficulties and temptations, but, as the supply of food is legitimate and necessary, it cannot be wrong for a Christian to be engaged in it; and therefore it should not be impossible to carry it on with a conscience void of offence towards God and man, though to do so requires much more circumspection and watchfulness than *I* have exercised.' One cardinal principle should be 'not to carry on business to an extent that would endanger any one's property but one's own.' He adds that 'the Society of Friends have a large, and, I sometimes think, an increasing amount of guilt as regards the means of acquiring and disposing of wealth,' and concludes with a humble reference to his earthly life as a scene, 'in which I have not only fallen very far short of my duty, but have done what was wrong in numberless instances, and from which I have no hope of being transferred to those regions where sin and sorrow are no more, but through Redeeming Love and Mercy.'

What judgment shall we pass to-day upon the actions that gave rise to such severe reproaches? No harsh one, assuredly. Our acquaintance with the facts is incomplete,

<sup>1</sup> That is, the general assembly, for church affairs, etc., of members residing in Great Britain.

and we know that Joseph Sturge was habitually a stern and exacting judge of his own conduct. It would indeed have been pleasanter to the biographer to have overlooked this side of his life. But it seemed right to take notice of documents in which the merchant had set down in solemn and deliberate language his own estimate of the weak points in his business career. Sturge himself, who used to praise the biographical candour which recorded the shameful denial of the Apostle Peter, would have surely desired such faithfulness of record. And to us these pangs of conscience appear to reflect unusual credit upon the man who felt them so acutely, while a less tender-spirited person would have been unmoved by inward doubts. For the Quaker corn merchant, in the eyes of the Socialist critic of the twentieth century, was endeavouring to reconcile two things which are quite incompatible, namely, the dictates of the Gospel of co-operative Love and the competitive strife of the profit-making system.

It was, in the view of the present writer, this inherent incompatibility of two opposite ideals which partly explains why Joseph Sturge was led into so many moral dilemmas, and why his sensitive spirit came to be so sorely wounded. This fact, though it does not account for everything, was probably at the root of much of his distress over his business, unconscious as he himself, with his individualist creed, was of it. There seemed to him no way, other than by private trading for profit, of supplying with corn the people of our land; and, in point of fact, no other satisfactory way had been organised and scarcely even suggested at the time. The stars of the Socialist and co-operative movements were then only glimmering feebly above the national horizon. The principles of Socialism, only now beginning to be dimly understood by the general public, were to Sturge's generation but vague utopian dreams, generally regarded as subversive of society. And it was not until the fifties that the Rochdale Pioneers and other associations began by their success to show the possibilities of co-operative trading. We cannot blame the

natural ignorance of the Christian merchant of early Victorian days, as we believe it to be more reasonable to blame the prejudice of his successor to-day, when, in spite of all mismanagement, the experience of war organisation has at least shown the possibility, under an honest and enlightened administration, of the successful public control of importation, distribution, and prices, and when we have a vigorous Labour Party which has placed upon its programme 'the progressive elimination from the control of industry of the private capitalist, individual or joint-stock; and the setting free for the service of the community of all who work, whether by hand or brain.'<sup>1</sup>

All these ideas were out of reach of Joseph Sturge, who could only conclude, as we have seen, that the supply of corn by the private capitalist was necessary to the existence of society, and that, therefore, it was as well for Christians to engage in it. Inasmuch as no better way seemed open to him, we may well honour him for his courage in persevering in a course full of possibilities of error, instead of closing up avenues of usefulness by retiring from the world in order to avoid its temptations. It was the same intrepid spirit of courting moral risks as that which led him in his political life to throw himself into the rapids of the Chartist movement.

The wonder is, that Sturge kept himself so extraordinarily free from that spirit of Mammon which clings to the markets of competitive commerce, more especially when the gains and losses are on a large scale. That he succeeded in this is a testimony to the power of prayer and the simplicity of Christ within him, and to the salutary results of his constant and concurrent preoccupation with benevolent schemes and social service. Thus he was known, instead of pressing his claim upon defaulting debtors, to go out of his way to relieve them when in distress. In one case, where the decision of a referee, on a question that arose between his firm and another party, subsequently seemed to have been unduly in his favour, he and his

<sup>1</sup> *Labour and the New Social Order* (1918), p. 12.



brother reopened the matter, so as to pay over £300 to the other firm. It will perhaps suffice to give at some length one striking illustration of loyalty to conscience, both as typical of many others, and as evidence of Joseph Sturge's consistent views on a subject of vast importance, that of temperance reform.

The Sturges had, like other farmers' children of the time, been brought up to see no harm in the moderate use of alcoholic drinks. But in the twenties the pioneers of Temperance began to enlighten the country; Joseph was convinced in 1827, and became thereafter a total abstainer. For the sake of consistency he at once abandoned that part of his trade in grain that was directly concerned with the manufacture of intoxicants. Some years later he came to doubt how far he could conscientiously take any part, even an indirect one, in the sale or purchase of barley for malting purposes. So, in spite of the opposition of his brother, he decided that the firm, at very considerable sacrifice, should take this further step. In answer to the astonished remonstrance of one of his commercial connections, we find him writing the following characteristic letter:—

‘To C. D., Corn Exchange, London.

‘BIRMINGHAM, 11th month, 5th, 1844.

‘ESTEEMED FRIEND,

‘Thy letter of the 4th ult. has the following remark on the notice contained in our last Monthly Circular:—“The singular resolution you have come to, as to not selling malting barley, has been much canvassed here to-day. I regret it much, and the more so as I can discover no good and sound reason for it.” This observation and some other circumstances induce me to give a further explanation why this resolution was adopted, believing that thyself and many other of our friends, though differing in opinion, will not condemn a course which results from a conviction of duty.

‘Intemperance produces such an incalculable amount of vice and misery, that I consider it right to use my influence to promote the principles of total abstinence. This I feel the more bound to do, as nearly twenty years' personal experience,

and much observation in this and other parts of the world, have convinced me that fermented liquors are not necessary to health, and that those, who refrain even from what is termed the moderate use of them, are in consequence capable of more bodily and mental exertion, and exempt from many maladies which afflict others.

‘In accordance with these views, our firm has long altogether declined the sale of malt, or the supply of any grain-distilleries, and has converted to other uses cellars which many years ago we let to wine and spirit merchants. Our continuing to take commissions for the sale and purchase of barley for the purpose of malting has for some years caused me much uneasiness; and I have recently been so fully convinced that it is wrong to do so, that I must have withdrawn from our concern, had it not been relinquished. The belief that we are responsible for the means of acquiring, as well as for the use we make of our property, and that we cannot exercise too rigid a watchfulness over *our own* conduct, is compatible with perfect charity towards those who differ from us in opinion.

‘I am, respectfully,

‘JOSEPH STURGE.’

As an employer of labour, Sturge was exceptionally beloved. His business at Gloucester was maintained by seventy or eighty workmen with their families. To each of these homes he felt a personal responsibility, and each was visited by him regularly. Once a year he met them at a social tea-party and conversazione, where he was in the habit of presenting each family with a parcel of books to be added to the shelves of the bookcase, which, through his thoughtfulness, had been provided in each cottage. Disputes with his employees are said to have been unknown, and after his death fifty-eight of them sent a touching letter to his widow, in which they spoke of him ‘as a dear friend, who had ever at heart our welfare, which he sought to promote by many and repeated acts of personal kindness.’

So much having been said as to the means by which Joseph Sturge acquired his wealth, a few lines must be devoted to his manner of disposing of it. He lived in a comfortable home, according to the middle-class standards

of his day, though avoiding all that savoured of extravagance. He had probably no conception of the Christian Socialist ideal of common ownership and one standard of living for all. But his wealth was to him a stewardship, and as such he scrupulously dispensed it, without ostentation and often with a delicate reserve that helped the recipient as much as the gift itself. We are told that, up to the time when children were born to him, he devoted more than half his entire income to charitable purposes, afterwards about one-third. All the good causes which will be mentioned in subsequent chapters benefited largely by his subscriptions. And he had the happiness of seeing many broken lives transformed or solaced by the helping hand his wealth enabled him to hold out to them. Through his agency working men were enabled to emigrate or start again in business, worn-out toilers received a pension, invalids found it possible to take an expensive course of treatment. Richard Cobden was amongst those of his friends who benefited; and we find him writing thus to Sturge in 1857:—

‘ Have you a California of your own, or is the miracle of the widow’s cruse performed by you in sovereigns instead of oil, or how do you contrive to give away five times more than other people, and still keep up your credit in Mark Lane? ’

Generosity is an easy and a not uncommon virtue with the rich, but it is rare to find it accompanied, as it was in Sturge, by two other features. In the first place, it was already practised when he was comparatively poor; and secondly, it was combined with a persistent and marked conviction of the tendency of riches to corrupt their possessor. This view of his is so striking in a man of his position, and the truth of it is so easily forgotten, that it is worth while quoting a number of extracts from his letters which allude to it:—

‘ Endeavour to realise in thy mind not only the utter worthlessness of riches, but the curse they almost uniformly are to their possessors.’



'I am convinced that the happiness of children is not generally increased by inheriting affluence from their parents.'

'I wish to be thy companion in realising the danger of riches as represented by our Saviour—a danger which, I believe, increases with our years, while at the same time we may become more unconscious of the folly of embracing more closely our wealth, as the time we can retain it lessens.'

'The more I have reflected upon the subject, the more I am convinced, that, notwithstanding the almost universal practice to the contrary, the laying up of a large future provision for children or relatives is not a justification in the sight of God for the present neglect of anything that duty appears to require; and the curse, which such provisions almost invariably prove to those who receive them, would have strongly confirmed me in this view, even had not our Saviour's words been so very explicit on this point.'

'One of the things which has struck me most forcibly with regard to wealth, is the curse it often proves to children. Really, both in our Society and out of it, I find that, if I want any young person to help me in any benevolent or religious object, I must, with rare exceptions, go to those who are dependent upon their own exertions for support; the children of the rich, too often, will not only do nothing themselves, but, like "the dog in the manger," try to obstruct those who do.'

'Thou speakest of the prosperity of commerce . . . I confess I do not hear with much pleasure of this prosperity, so far as its influence on character is concerned. It seems so generally accompanied by an increased use of it for mere selfish indulgences, or an increased desire to accumulate wealth, that it often makes me sad. But the conviction that I have a very short time left for labour ought to make me doubly watchful more and more honestly to endeavour to remove the beam out of my own eye, instead of looking for the mote in my brother's eye.'

How, we may ask, would Joseph Sturge have endured poverty—not genteel or rustic poverty, but the threadbare, degrading city poverty, into which so many millions are thrust to-day by the terribly unchristian character of our civilisation? We have not the means of answering; but his strong nature would probably have come through the ordeal with the minimum of demoralisation, and we

should have had another instance of how Christian saintliness can survive even in the hell of a city slum. Temporary hardship, at any rate, and threatened ruin he bore with courage and equanimity. We are told by an intimate friend that at least twice he lost a large part of his property, and that on these occasions he at once with characteristic decision reduced his expenditure to his altered circumstances. In the early part of his career he limited his expenses to £100 a year for three years in succession, and he was known sometimes to deny himself a dinner, that he might still have something to bestow on the more necessitous. He often referred in later life to the benefit he had derived from this resolute course of self-denial. In 1822, just before his removal to Birmingham from Bewdley, he wrote:—

‘I have again had losses and trials in business, but I fear they have not had that purifying effect upon me for which they are no doubt intended. It seems probable that I shall lose very nearly all my property, and I am sometimes ready to think it will be right for me to get into some menial situation.’

In a menial position Joseph Sturge would assuredly have served and done honour to his Creator, but many thousands of human beings, British and coloured, had cause to rejoice that outward circumstances afforded him opportunity for a career of public service.

## CHAPTER IV

## EMANCIPATION IN THE WEST INDIES

THE civilisation of Greece and Rome was founded upon the institution of personal slavery, and perished in large part as a consequence of that rotten foundation, with all it implied. It was the influence of Christianity, acting through the medieval Church, that gradually undermined the serfdom that succeeded slavery, so that its ultimate abolition in modern times became inevitable. But unhappily the period of the Renaissance, which opened up the tropics as a field for the enterprise and the greed of Europe, re-introduced the old barbarity in the form of negro slavery, which was considered indispensable for the development of colonial possessions. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there were doubtless many Christians, whose tender consciences realised its iniquity, and whose silent prayers and protests have contributed to swell the spiritual tide which made its abolition possible; but, with the exception of George Fox and a few of his Quaker contemporaries, scarcely any articulate voices have reached our ears. Even the Quaker conscience was slumbering during the first quarter of the eighteenth century; and no Christian objection seems to have been raised against the so-called Assiento treaty with Spain in 1713, which gave Britain the privilege of transporting 4800 negroes annually from Africa to the Spanish colonies. The wealth of many English families was built up by the century of slave-trading and slave-holding that followed this national crime; but gradually, as the horrors of the trade became realised, the consciences of individuals were stirred to action. Dr. Johnson was one of the earliest pro-



testors, and went so far as to outrage the feelings of his friends by making a negro servant his principal heir. The Society of Friends after much heart-searching took up emancipation as a test question in regard to their membership. By about 1763 in Britain (by 1784 in America) that body had cleared itself of direct complicity in slavery and the slave trade. It was not until 1776 that the subject was brought before Parliament. The versatile scholar Granville Sharp was the pioneer; and from this time the great energies of William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson were enlisted for the cause. The campaign was opened with a petition presented to Parliament by the Society of Friends for the extinction of the slave-trade. The spread of a healthy public opinion in the matter was chiefly due to the impetus of the Methodist and Evangelical revivals. John Wesley, from his death-bed, sent in 1791 to Wilberforce a last charge urging him to go forward in this holy warfare. The movement was kept alive by the voluntary abstinence of thousands from slave-grown produce. Both Pitt and Fox were favourable to its objects; and the consequence was that, in spite of the general stoppage of reforms caused by the distractions of the long war with France, a measure for the abolition of the slave-trade was carried in 1807.

The years that followed were occupied, as far as the stress of the war and of social disorganisation allowed, in making effective the principle secured by the 1807 Act. It was found necessary, by Brougham's bill of 1811, to constitute the trade a felony; and the Slave Registration Act of 1819 was framed to put a check upon the transference of slaves from one West Indian colony to another. Meanwhile slavery itself persisted, and was unchallenged in Parliament till 1823, when Thomas Fowell Buxton brought forward a very cautious motion advocating its gradual abolition. The mantle of Wilberforce fell naturally upon Buxton; and it is interesting to notice that the first influence which led him to come out into the open was that of his brother-in-law William Forster, who was, as

we have seen, Joseph Sturge's intimate friend. It was James Cropper, the father-in-law of Sturge, who appears to have been the first to advocate abolition in public.

At this time the immediate aim of the leading Abolitionists was the gradual improvement of the condition of the slaves preparatory to eventual emancipation. These efforts were bitterly opposed by the West Indian planters, who had the controlling voice not only, as might be expected, among the peers and bishops, but in the unreformed House of Commons and in the press. The friends of the negroes were represented in the colonies by missionaries from the Methodist, Baptist, and Independent Societies. These men were naturally persecuted by the planters; and in 1824 the death in prison of the missionary John Smith, 'the Demerara martyr,' thoroughly roused the Nonconformist conscience at home. The more resolute supporters of the movement began to see that the slave-holding interest was determined to resist all efforts to restrict their powers or to educate the slave for freedom; and the sin of tolerating any continuance of the evil was more and more realised. Unfortunately, however, Buxton and the leading Abolitionists, who in 1827 formed the Anti-slavery Society on the ruins of the effete 'African Institution,' were too cautious to raise the standard of total and immediate emancipation.<sup>1</sup> The necessity of this was indeed increasingly recognised by many of the rank and file; but such was the fear of giving colour to the charge that the Abolitionists, by making definite promises to the slaves, were inciting them to rise in armed revolt against their masters, that few of the leaders had the courage to go beyond gradual emancipation. One of these few was, however, Joseph Sturge.

Bristol was one of the chief centres from which the eighteenth-century slave-traders conducted their inhuman

<sup>1</sup> The first public advocacy of this plan was due, as Joseph Sturge was fond of recalling, to a pamphlet published in 1824 by Elizabeth Heyrick, a Leicester Friend; just as it was another Quakeress, Anne Knight of Chelmsford, who issued in 1847 one of the very first pleas for Woman Suffrage.



operations. The boy Joseph must have been told of this. He may have seen the fetters used for the negro victims; he must have noticed the fields of neighbouring farms sown with horse-beans, to be sold to the Bristol dealers as food for the stolen slaves during their Atlantic voyage. He was old enough to rejoice over the abolition by law of the horrible traffic, and thereafter he must have entered warmly into the many expressions of protest against slavery itself which were heard in the gatherings of the Quaker body. It was shortly after his arrival in Birmingham, in 1823 (the year when Wilberforce presented to Parliament a petition from the Quakers against the iniquity), that he first began to work for the greatest interest of his life. About this time, as we have seen, he came under the influence of James Cropper, and for some years his chief work lay in assisting this travelling missionary of the cause, organising meetings in various towns, chiefly in the Midlands. In 1826 he became secretary of the newly-formed Birmingham Anti-slavery Society.

Sturge's mind was not one of the subtle and diplomatic sort, that foresees difficulties and tries to overcome them by wire-pulling and by concessions. His strength lay rather in his simple, direct outlook, and in the intense moral conviction, resting on his Christian faith, that drove him on in unwearied efforts. Those who disagreed with him often thought him obstinate, extreme, and unpractical, but more than once the issue proved him right; and, in any case, his moral and intellectual constitution demanded a single, clear-cut issue, shorn of compromise or bargaining. It was inevitable therefore that he should attach himself to the 'total and immediate' wing of the Abolitionists. His first task was to convert his own Society to this attitude. Some notes of a long address given at their Yearly Meeting of 1830 well reveal his point of view. He shows the merciless determination of the planters to prevent the efforts to prepare the slave gradually for freedom; yet he puts in a word for the planters, demoralised by their position, for, 'viewing them with the eye of a Christian and as



accountable beings, they are far more to be pitied than the victims of their oppression.' He urges the prudence and justice of immediate emancipation, backing it up with the following consideration upon which he himself acted with a rare degree of consistency.

'When the Christian is convinced that the principle upon which he acts is correct, I believe it does not become him to examine too closely his probability of success, but rather to act in the assurance that, if he faithfully does his part, as much success will attend his efforts as is consistent with the will of that Divine Leader under whose banner he is enlisted.'

Meanwhile the division of opinion in the ranks of the Anti-slavery Society was coming to a head. In 1831 a number of the more vigorous spirits,—'Young England Abolitionists' as they were called—including Sturge, Cropper, and George Stephen, broke away and formed 'The Agency Committee' to advocate immediate emancipation by novel methods of popular agitation.<sup>1</sup> The result was the first instance in England of a crusade of political education; and it proved extraordinarily effective. In the face of a hostile parliament and press, meetings of all sorts were organised, the country was flooded with literature, paid lecturers were engaged, the services of women were utilised. Throughout the Midland counties Sturge was indefatigable in prosecuting the campaign. Birmingham, largely through his efforts, became, after London, the chief centre of the movement. We find him supporting Anti-slavery candidates at elections held in Bridgnorth, Gloucester, and Bristol. These were the years when the great struggle that ended in the first Reform Act was being fought out. To a large extent Reform and Anti-

<sup>1</sup> The most readable and accessible authority for the movement is Sir George Stephen's *Anti-Slavery Recollections* published in 1854. It is remarkable that this book contains very few references to Joseph Sturge. This omission is probably to be explained by the existence of both public and personal differences of opinion between the two men. Thus we know that Stephen would have nothing to do with the later agitation against the apprenticeship; and the book was published during the Crimean War, when Sturge was in great odium owing to his pacifist activities.

slavery were advocated together; for the cause of Abolition was felt to be hopeless in the Parliament of rotten boroughs. When the election was held for the first reformed Parliament, the Abolitionist propaganda was redoubled. Candidates throughout the country were asked whether 'they will strenuously promote and vote for the immediate and total abolition of British Colonial Slavery.'

The result of all this was that in 1832 there was at last a House of Commons with a large Anti-slavery majority. But in this, as in other respects, the new Parliament was disappointing, and the Government showed signs of being willing to shelve the question; so that at the beginning of 1833 a new agitation was necessary. In this Sturge took a leading part, visiting Ireland and Scotland to stir up opinion. In April three hundred and forty delegates from all parts of the country met at Exeter Hall, and presented a kind of ultimatum to the Government. The Government became convinced of the strength of the feeling among the middle-class voters who supported them, and soon produced an Emancipation Bill. The measure was a compromise, for, though it proclaimed freedom for the negro from August of the following year, it provided for a gift of £20,000,000 as compensation to the planters, and seriously detracted from the value of emancipation by fixing a period of six years from its proclamation, during which the negro was to remain in a condition of apprenticeship that left him very much at the mercy of the planters. These proposals produced another unhappy division in the ranks of the Abolitionists. Buxton and others thought it wiser to accept what the Government offered, rather than risk the loss of the bill. The more vigorous party, of whom by this time Sturge seems to have been the acknowledged head, were indignant. They considered that compensation was due not to the master, but to the slave, as the injured party; and they rightly foresaw the evils of the apprenticeship. It was painful for Sturge at this time to have to differ so strongly from many of his friends; yet he did not waver. The faithful Sophia as usual backed him



up. We find a letter in which she prays him 'not, for the appearance of evil, to desert his high vantage ground of uncompromising justice,' and tenderly urges him to secure 'opportunities of retirement' for prayer, so that he may 'walk unharmed and untouched through this season of excitement.'

The Emancipation Act was, however, passed in the form we have indicated, and most of the Abolitionists, though regretting the concessions, accepted them and retired from the fray. Not so Joseph Sturge. The two years following the passing of the 1833 Act covered the period of his courtship, marriage, and sudden bereavement. But within four months of this tragic event we find him in London again hard at work for the cause, which now largely revolved round his leadership. In the West Indies the day fixed for the emancipation in August, 1834, passed off with nothing worse than dancing and prayer meetings on the part of the negro, but, owing to the illusory provisions of the Act, his condition was little improved. Only children under six were free, the remainder were 'apprentices' for at least six years. The legal position of such an apprentice in Jamaica was summed up as follows by a good authority:—

'He is nominally subject only to gratuitous labour for his master for forty-five hours in the week, and to certain disabilities for public offices. . . . But in fact, he remains an *emancipated prisoner* on the plantation to which he is attached; substantially liable to the same punishments and labouring under the same incapacities as heretofore. He cannot quit the estate, even during his own hours, without fear of punishment. He cannot complain to the magistrate or remonstrate with the master without risk of flogging for "insolence" or "unjustifiable" absence. The whip follows him at every step, imprisonment and hard labour wait him at every turn. His home is converted into a prison, and the plantation into a prison yard; and, as if to prevent the possibility of his forgetting the custody in which his apprenticeship places him, penal gangs patrol the estate, and bilboes<sup>1</sup> are constructed in every village. Notwithstanding the reiterated provisions of

<sup>1</sup> A kind of stocks.



the Colonial Acts, affecting to guarantee to him the undisturbed enjoyment of the time emphatically called his own, the machinery of those Acts is so contrived that he may, if he has once absented himself without permission, be legally worked for forty-two hours, in uninterrupted succession, and then dismissed with a flogging, if he ventures to complain.'

The law was bad enough, but the situation was greatly aggravated by the partiality of the magistrate and by the careless brutality of many of the planters, who wished to retain their power over the negro, and moreover, now that they were losing him as 'property,' were ready to break down his health and strength by excessive tasks and punishments. There was besides a grave risk, suggested by certain provisions in the Act itself, that the period of apprenticeship would be employed by the colonists in forging a more permanent system of coercion, which would retain the rising generation of negroes in a servile condition. This was threatened by the revival of obsolete laws, intended to fix degradation on free men of colour, and by such new devices as vagrancy laws, wages acts, laws to compel the apprenticeship of children, or to confine the negro to particular localities.

The knowledge of all this convinced Sturge and his friends that they must rally their forces to press for the immediate and complete abolition of the apprenticeship. The planters had received their twenty millions paid by the nation for the redemption of the slave, but they had not released their hold upon him. This was felt by thousands of Englishmen as 'a practical and deliberate fraud'; and the indignation at having been defrauded was added to that burning sense of the national sin of slavery, which had been the motive power of the movement among the religious public. Their allies in Parliament, including Fowell Buxton himself, were unfortunately persuaded to leave it to the Government to improve the situation. But in the country during 1835 and 1836 the agitation was renewed. The difficulty, at this time, was to secure from the West Indies sufficient first-hand evidence to persuade

the thinking public that emancipation had been a fraud and that widespread cruelty was still practised upon the negroes. So dangerous was it for the missionaries and others to brave the anger of the planters by exposing their methods, that there was little available testimony that could be used, except under the shelter of anonymity. To supply this need, it was felt that some one must go from England to bring home a trustworthy report. It was no enviable excursion, thus to provoke the animosity of the slave-holders. An English officer had written some time before from the Indies, saying that if Buxton or his friends 'arrived in any island and ventured to move out unsurrounded by a guard of those grateful beings who, night and day, implore blessings upon them, they would inevitably be torn to pieces by the Europeans.' Undeterred, however, by this inviting prospect and by the discomforts of a voyage before the days of ocean steamers, Joseph Sturge decided to go himself. He made his arrangements, selected as his companion his friend Thomas Harvey, a contemporary and schoolfellow of John Bright's, and, with two other enterprising Quakers, set sail on board the *Skylark* mail packet for Barbadoes in November, 1836.

Sturge and Harvey began by investigating the condition of Antigua, which had been almost the only colony to reject the apprenticeship and to grant complete emancipation in 1834, to the manifest improvement of its industry. From there they returned, by way of Montserrat, the French slave island of Martinique, and other small islands, to Barbadoes. It was in the last-named colony and during three months of strenuous labour in Jamaica that the most conclusive evidence was obtained. In April Sturge embarked for home, sailing by way of New York.

The results of this tour were soon afterwards published in a volume called *The West Indies in 1837*, which was edited, and to a large extent written, by Thomas Harvey. The book is a faithful record, that attracted much attention at the time, of what the travellers saw and heard. It is unnecessary here to summarise it in any detail. It



suffices to say that the fears and suspicions in regard to the cruelty of the apprenticeship were fully confirmed. On many estates the overseers of the slavery days continued their brutal oppression of the negro. The provisions of the Act as regards lodging and treatment were not observed. Tens of thousands of apprentices were punished with the lash, the treadmill, or the chain gang. Women and old men were put on the treadmill for offences such as 'linen badly washed, and impertinence.' Magistrates conspired with the planters to coerce the negro, and one of the few exceptions was dismissed from the bench because he had, according to the official report, 'administered the abolition law in the spirit of the English Abolition Act'! All this, and a great deal of other evidence of cruel injustice was contained in the book. Only one colonist made a serious attempt to deny the allegations; and it is remarkable that he gave his negroes their freedom shortly after the two friends published a reply to his protestations.

The West Indies volume is a disappointing one to the biographer, for, with a characteristic suppression of self, its authors included in it scarcely any record of their own thoughts or feelings. This omission made it, however, more valuable at the time, as evidence that was presumably trustworthy. The facts that were indispensable to open the eyes of the public had been obtained, while the emotional touch was secured by the presence and narrative of a negro, James Williams, whom Sturge had brought home with him, after redeeming him from dreadful misery. The voyage bore its desired fruit; within fifteen months of its conclusion the apprentices were free. These breathless months formed the most glorious epoch of Sturge's life, when he became something of a hero in the eyes of thousands. And his qualifications for conducting the agitation were undoubted. True, he was far from being a brilliant orator, but he was a sound and ready speaker, who won confidence by his guileless sincerity and earnestness of manner. He had a deeply rooted trust in the popular instinct, assuming that it was sufficiently well informed; and his robust constitution



took away the nervous fear of popular methods of propaganda, which obsesses so many equally religious minds.

It was found necessary to form a new organisation for the purpose in hand, and the 'Central Negro Emancipation Committee' sent out its agents and appeals throughout the country. Scarcely any of the old Abolitionist leaders, with the exception of Sturge and of George Thompson, the ablest of the 'Agency Committee' lecturers, could be persuaded to move. But the zeal of the younger men made up for their inexperience. Starting from Birmingham, the Dissenters and their allies were roused by meetings in all parts of the kingdom. The *Times* might scornfully speak of them as 'the dupes of certain commission-travellers in the grievance line, your Sturges and your Thompsons,' but even an apathetic Parliament was moved by the black-coated delegates to Exeter Hall. Sturge was examined for seven days by a House of Commons Committee, of whom the young Gladstone was one; for the future champion of liberty began his career as the son of a wealthy slave-holder, and made his first great parliamentary speech by an oration against the abolition of the apprenticeship. The brilliant but erratic Lord Brougham decided to support the Abolitionists and moved a resolution in the House of Lords that the apprenticeship should cease on August 1, 1838, instead of on the corresponding date in 1840, as contemplated by the statute of 1833. The House of Commons was stirred by the eloquence of the great Irish politician, Daniel O'Connell, a consistent friend of the negro; and, in spite of the determined opposition of the Government, 215 members in a House of 484 supported a similar motion to that moved in the Upper House. This moral victory was won in March, 1838. Its fame was eclipsed by the carrying of a later abolition motion in May by a majority of three in a thin House; but the earlier vote proved decisive in securing the triumph of the object in view. For the Government, though obstinately refusing to shorten the apprenticeship by statute, were moved by

the evidence of popular feeling to proceed with a bill for the further protection of the apprentices, which, among other provisions, took away the right of the colonists to flog them. Outside Parliament, the clamour was rising to a pitch which the West India interest did not think it prudent to defy any longer. In private despatches even the Government recommended the colonial legislatures to give way and release the apprentices. And so it fell out that, within a few weeks, Acts were passed in the various islands giving complete liberty to the slaves on the very day fixed by the Abolitionists. Jamaica was the last to give way, and she did so admittedly on the ground that apprentices were not worth having, if the means to compel them to work, namely the lash, were to be taken out of the masters' hands by the new Government bill.

So at last the victory was won; and 800,000 human beings were freed from degrading slavery. And Joseph Sturge's heart was filled with humble thankfulness for having been an instrument in bringing about this great reform. If this one act of helping to shorten the apprenticeship by two years had been the solitary achievement of his life, he would not have lived in vain. Among the many congratulations which he received during the days immediately preceding the date of emancipation, two are selected as showing how more famous men than he regarded his share in the triumph.

From his standpoint as an Irish Catholic the great O'Connell wrote to him as follows:—

'What ineffable delight it must afford you, my esteemed friend, to reflect that your exertions have created a flame before which the chains of two years' slavery of half a million, at the lowest calculation, of your fellow-men have melted away! But for your exertions the two years more of apprenticeship would certainly be inflicted; and every hour of these two years would become more and more aggravated in cruelty. If you had remained at home, it is perfectly clear—clear beyond any doubt—that these two years would have continued without remission. This is, indeed, a proud thought for you, and, in spite of any shrinking from praise, all good

men on earth will thank you; and may our gracious God reward you with eternal happiness, is my fervent prayer.'

Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, who had already generously admitted that his view on the apprenticeship question had been mistaken, sent Sturge the following expression of thanks:—

'All other feelings are absorbed in the sincere and deep satisfaction arising from the knowledge that in thirty-two hours from this time those chains that have been so weighty upon me for fifteen years, as upon the bodies of those who have borne them, are so soon to be broken. I bless God, that He who has always raised up agents such as the crisis required, sent you to the West Indies. I bless God, that during the apprenticeship not one act of violence against the person of a white man has, I believe, been perpetrated by a negro; and I cannot but express my grateful exultation that those whom the colonial law so recently reckoned "as brute beasts," the fee-simple absolute whereof resided in their owners, will so soon after the expiration of another day be clothed with the full rights of man, and stand on a level with those who once would have thought it an insult to humanity, and almost an impiety to God, if any one had presumed to suppose that their "chattels" and themselves were equals. . . .'

And the testimony of Lord Brougham to Joseph Sturge's achievements, as it came to his first biographer through the pen of Cobden, is humorous and striking enough to be worth quoting, although its final phrase at least is an exaggeration of the truth.<sup>1</sup>

'I remember a very graphic description which Lord Brougham gave me, in a conversation at his house in Grafton Street, of Sturge's conduct in the matter of the apprenticeship system, which he adduced as an illustration of our friend's indomitable energy. He told me of Sturge coming to him to arraign the conduct of the masters in the West Indies for oppressing their apprentices; how he (Brougham) laughed at

<sup>1</sup> As regards this anecdote, Cobden wrote in a later letter to H. Richard that he could swear to the main incidents, and that he remembered well how Brougham brandished a poker, as he repeated the last words quoted below.



him, deriding him in this fashion for proposing to abolish the apprenticeship: "Why, Joseph Sturge, how can you be such an old woman as to dream that you can revive the Anti-slavery agitation to put an end to the apprenticeship?"—how the quiet Quaker met him with this reply: "Lord Brougham, if when Lord Chancellor thou hadst a ward in chancery who was apprenticed, and his master was violating the terms of indenture, what wouldst thou do?"—how he felt this as a home thrust, and replied, "Why, I should require good proof of the fact, Joseph Sturge, before I did anything": how our friend rejoined, "Then I must supply thee with the proof": how he packed his portmanteau and quietly embarked for the West Indies, made a tour of the islands, collected the necessary evidence of the oppression that was being practised on the negro apprentices by their masters, the planters: how he returned to England, and commenced an agitation throughout the country to abolish the apprenticeship, to accomplish which it was necessary to re-organise all the old Anti-slavery Societies which had been dissolved, or had laid down their arms, happy to be relieved from their long and arduous labours: how he brought them again into the field, and attained his object. This was the narrative of Lord Brougham, and well do I remember the very words in which in conclusion he awarded the whole merit to our friend. "Joseph Sturge," said he, "won the game off his own bat."

It is strange to think that the subject of these eulogies, who seemed so confident and indomitable, had written in his private journal near the beginning of his West Indian labours that he felt unworthy, because of his sins, 'to be employed even to hand the cup of cold water in the name of a disciple'; and that he had 'such a sense of weakness in himself, and such inability to approach his Heavenly Father in prayer, that it seems very unreasonable to expect that any good can be effected through such an unworthy instrument.' It is impossible to criticise a humility, which seems to have been the source of so much power to serve mankind.

In slave-holding America the fourth anniversary of the abolition of the apprenticeship was commemorated by the great Unitarian, William Channing, in an eloquent address,

in which he regards the emancipation as one of the greatest events in history, adding that the true 'liberator of these slaves was Jesus Christ.' And, as he described it in his paper, the occasion was celebrated by the negroes themselves with prayers and rejoicings and triumphal processions, but without, either then or subsequently, the apprehended disorder and riot. Many of the redeemed race preserved for long afterwards grateful memories of their benefactors. The Jamaican negroes, wishing to retain something to remind them of Joseph Sturge, are said to have fixed upon his 'broad brim' and resolved to wear exactly the same pattern, under the title of the Sturge hat. And from the representatives of a number of coloured congregations in the same island, his family received after his death a grateful testimonial, in which the following passage occurs:—

'All feel that they are bereaved of a friend and benefactor, whose anxiety and efforts for their welfare have never been surpassed, and will ever associate the name of Sturge in their recollection with Clarkson, Wilberforce, Buxton, and others, gone also to their reward—the noblest and best friends of the African race that history records.

'Mr. Sturge, however, not only occupied the highest rank as an Abolitionist; while he endeavoured to free the body of the slave from degrading vassalage, he to the last hour of his life consecrated his influence and property towards raising him, by Christian education, to that rank in the scale of being, of which by his circumstances and condition he had been so unjustly deprived. But for his unfaltering generosity in this department of benevolence (by no means the least important), and that of others of the Society of Friends in particular, in aiding the various educational establishments in Jamaica, as many of this meeting can testify, few would have emerged from the abject mental condition in which the dark reign of slavery left them.'

As the paragraph just quoted indicates, Joseph Sturge regarded the West Indian natives as his clients up to the end of his life. His assistance was given them in ways too numerous to mention. He contributed to induce the

Colonial Office to watch over the attempts of the planters to reimpose a measure of slavery, under the guise of vagrancy and other laws. He raised funds to assist the missionaries and other Europeans, whose friendship to the negro had led to their persecution by the planting interest. He planned the settlement of labourers on their own plots of land, so that they might not be at the mercy of the adjacent estates in the matter of wages. He conducted a constant and elaborate correspondence, right up to the day of his death, with the leading missionaries in the islands. He helped in 1838 to induce the Society of Friends and others to found the Jamaica Education Society for the support of schools, maintained chiefly by Baptist missionaries and sorely needed by the illiterate negro. The admiration which he had for these men, and his view of the duty of the Christian to invade the sphere of politics is well shown in the following passage, taken from a speech of Joseph Sturge's at a London meeting in honour of a Baptist missionary who had been charged with being too political:—

'I am one of those who have never been able to see that a Christian was not equally bound to discharge his political with his religious duties. We read that the advent of Him whose doctrine all missionaries preach, and whose example they profess to follow, was ushered in by the anthem of peace on earth and goodwill towards men. He beautifully united, in His own life, attention to the temporal and the spiritual wants and maladies of those by whom He was surrounded; and, if ever there was an instance in which the Divine blessing rested upon an endeavour to imitate this example—making due allowance for the weakness and inferiority of all human instruments—it is to be found in the field of Baptist missionary labour in Jamaica.'

About two years before his death, Joseph Sturge bought, in the little island of Montserrat, an old sugar estate which he named after the village of Elberton where he was born. His object was to show that sugar could be profitably grown by free labour. The island, as it turned out, was not adapted for this particular object, but the estate was



subsequently planted with lime trees, and it now helps to produce the well-known Montserrat lime juice. In starting the enterprise he gave instructions that his managers should be ready to sell off plots of land to the labourers, and the result of this sale has been the establishment of a very prosperous race of peasant proprietors.

The abiding value of the efforts outlined in the present chapter in regard both to the liberation and to the education of the West Indian negro is evident to any unprejudiced person who will study the social conditions to be found in the islands to-day, and compare them with the far sadder conditions in the neighbouring states of the American Union, where war and racial antagonism have left a terrible legacy of evil. The following statements, for instance, are taken from the writings of a very able administrator, whose knowledge of the West Indies extends over many years.<sup>1</sup> A Socialist and not, we understand, connected with any missionary society, his evidence on the debt to evangelical religion may be considered as impartial.

‘ In Jamaica there is no artificial or conventional disqualification whatever, to bar any negro or person of mixed race from occupying any position for which he is intellectually qualified in any department of the social or civic life of the island. There is doubtless colour prejudice; but, compared with that which prevails in the United States and in South Africa, it is insignificant and practically negligible. . . . Many coloured men are magistrates of Petty Sessions, more than one hold the office of Custos, that is to say, of chief magistrate of their parishes. These positions they fill with credit. . . . Whatever may be the cause, it is the indisputable fact, that Jamaica or any other West Indian island is as safe for any white woman to go about in—if not safer, than any European country with which I am acquainted.

‘ It is the fact, that the principle that has moulded these communities has been predominantly *religious*. . . . It was this [religious conviction] that brought about emancipation, and more important still, it is this, that through missionary and

<sup>1</sup> See *White Capital and Coloured Labour* (1906) by Sir Sydney Olivier, late Governor of Jamaica; and an article by the same writer in the *Contemporary Review*, October, 1906.

not through secular effort has resolutely fought for and carried on, so far as it has been carried, the education of the transplanted African. It has made him too dependent for forms of expression on evangelical religious catchwords, but it is evangelical Christianity that has won him and enabled him to win his position, by asserting and teaching him to appreciate his possession of a human soul, and it could not have fought the secular tendency to enslavement and race antagonism without belief in those formulas.'

The industrial revolution united with the shortsighted greed of the controlling class, so as to produce the injustice and the materialism of society, as it is to-day. But it seems probable that a far more terrible pitch of degradation would ere now have been reached, if the 'evangelical' and humanitarian revival of a century ago had not come just in time to arrest, in conjunction with the rise of democracy, an impending landslide into a system of world-wide slavery. At home the capitalists were depending upon the servile labour of adults and children in factory, workshop, and mine; the children at any rate were nothing less than slaves, and the men almost as badly off, so long as liberty of combination and the vote were denied to them. And if the time-honoured institution of slavery had been allowed to remain in the tropical dependencies of the European states, capitalist enterprise would have welded it into one world-embracing machine for squeezing profits out of the tortured native, which no reformers could have overthrown without some tremendous convulsion. Such machinery has actually been in operation in more than one part of the world, notably in the Confederate States of America, and more recently in the Belgian Congo, the Portuguese colonies, and other parts of Africa; and these newest systems of slavery have been as destructive of life and liberty as was the old slave trade. But if the capitalists of the British Empire had succeeded in frustrating the Anti-slavery movement that we have been describing, their example of slave-organisation would have spread like a plague all round the tropics, and, combining perhaps with a successful

maintenance of servile conditions in Europe, would have revived the paganism of the Roman Empire, with all the added horrors which scientific developments of industry entail. So, while making every effort to prevent a recurrence of a similar danger to-day, we cannot be too thankful for the moral enthusiasm that inspired our grandfathers in their battle for the negro's freedom.



## CHAPTER V

## THE STRUGGLE FOR POLITICAL LIBERTY

OUR admiration for the untiring energy of the friends of the black man is bound to be tempered by the feeling that most of these good middle-class people were moved to no corresponding indignation over the bitter wrongs inflicted before their eyes upon the working men and women of Britain, and that hardly any of them were prepared to give the oppressed class a share in the government of this country, such as might enable them to work for their social improvement. This was, happily, not the case with Joseph Sturge, as he grew older. It is to be feared that he shared, to some extent, in that almost universal blindness to the injustice meted out to the wage-earners, which has obsessed the minds of their 'superiors,' whether they be Christian or not by profession. Like the rest of us, he had too little of that sympathetic imagination which is the highest and rarest of all social virtues. But he cannot have failed to have been haunted at times by such sights as might any day be seen in the horrible slums of Birmingham, the condition of which was then far worse even than it is to-day. And it was doubtless such memories, joined with a true understanding of Christianity as the religion of liberty, brotherhood, and a very large measure of equality, that drove him gradually into the camp of the uncompromising Radicals and democrats. The early stages of his development in this direction are hidden from our eyes. Farmer Sturge, so far as he regarded politics at all, was a Tory, and it seems to have been only during the period of distress following the peace of 1815 that his sons developed their Radical views. From 1823, as we have seen,

Joseph's engrossing public interest was Anti-slavery, and it was probably for this cause predominantly that he took part in contested elections at Bridgnorth and elsewhere. It was the reform crisis of the tumultuous year 1831-2 which first induced him to declare himself to his fellow-citizens as a supporter of democracy.

At the outbreak of the French Revolution the movement for political reform in Britain was already a strong and promising one. It was thrown back for at least thirty years by the reaction from that terrible event and by the wars which followed. In the twenties it rapidly gathered strength again. Nor is this strange, when we consider that considerably more than half the members of Parliament owed their seats to the direct interference of about two hundred and fifty privileged individuals. Birmingham was the fourth largest town in England, with a population of 100,000; and it was, up to 1832, an 'unincorporate' district without any representation in the Commons. Yet Wellington, the Tory Prime Minister of 1830, declared that the parliamentary system was the best which human wisdom could devise! In the summer of that year the hopes of the people had been profoundly stirred by the success of the Paris revolution against the tyranny of the Bourbons. All over the country there sprang up spontaneously an organisation of political unions, in which both middle and working class were associated. This association was all the more remarkable, because one of the most marked features of these years is the deep cleavage of thought and sympathy between these two sections of the community—a cleavage far more acutely felt than it is to-day. The Birmingham Political Union was the first and most powerful of the new bodies. Its aim was a real and effective measure of popular representation, and its weapon was 'the peaceful display of an immense organised moral power, which cannot be despised or disregarded.' There seems reason to believe that many of its members were secretly making ready for an armed rising, should the Government refuse, in the last event, to concede reform. But openly the Union

repudiated the methods of physical force, and this view of its constitution was no doubt the one generally accepted by its middle-class adherents.

The year 1831 did not close without destructive riots and threatenings of revolution. The acutest crisis of all came in May of the following year. For the third time a Reform Bill was before Parliament; it was evident that the House of Lords would reject it, while King William was unwilling to create sufficient new peers to ensure its passing. On May 9th the Government favourable to Reform resigned. On the next day an open-air demonstration, said to number 200,000 persons, was held outside Birmingham amid extraordinary indignation and enthusiasm. The situation was alarming in the extreme. Up in the barracks the Scots Greys had received orders to sharpen their swords; and many of the Birmingham workshops were turning out small spiked balls to be strewn along the roads, so as to lame the horses of the charging troopers. It was in such circumstances that Joseph Sturge, along with about five hundred of the more intelligent citizens of his own standing, took the step of joining the Political Union. He was immediately attacked for disloyalty to the cause of 'law and order,' as well as for violating the 'advices' or written principles of his own religious society. We shall consider later in detail the attitude of the majority of the Friends to progressive politics. Whatever their feelings in this crisis, it seems improbable that more than a very few of them were persuaded to enter the Political Union. The two brothers, Joseph and John, were, however, concerned to prove that they were within their rights, both as loyal Quakers and as peaceful 'law-abiding' citizens, in becoming members of the Union, and they wrote to the *Birmingham Gazette* a long letter, in which the following vigorous passages occur:—

'We should be extremely sorry, were it to go forth to the world that there exists anything either in the principles or in the practice of the Society of Friends which forbids its members from joining their fellow-countrymen in a peaceable



co-operation for the recovery of their political rights, and that at the present crisis it should be thought that they did not, as a body, deeply sympathise with the almost unanimous desire of the nation for parliamentary reform, on which so many of the dearest interests of humanity depend, or were unwilling, as far as is consistent with the peaceable principles of the Gospel, to share in the difficulties and dangers attendant on the effort for obtaining it.'

'Can anything more effectually tend to secure peaceful obedience to the laws at the present awful crisis, and during the still more fearful times which we have reason to dread, than the influence of an association comprising the great bulk of the lower and a large portion of the middle classes, and binding its members to such a line of conduct as this? We think not; and we have therefore felt it a duty to give it our feeble support by enrolling our names among its members; and in doing so we have acted in the manner most conducive, in our opinion, to the great end of averting the evils which threaten our beloved country.'

'We earnestly entreat all those persons, whether members of our own or any other society, who have hitherto been satisfied in doing nothing, to ask themselves the serious question, whether, at such a period, they fulfil the duties of a citizen and a Christian, if they any longer withhold their public support from the cause of peace, order, and social improvement?'

These sentences form the earliest extant declaration of Sturge's democratic faith. During the six years following the passing of the Reform Bill in June, 1832, the share of his giant energies which he was able to give to politics continued to be absorbed predominantly in the movement for overthrowing slavery and the apprenticeship which succeeded it. Yet in 1835 we find him helping to start a new paper *The Reformer*, which was 'quite too radical' for his cautious father-in-law; and he certainly took occasional part in the church-rate controversy and other minor democratic movements of the day. This seems also the place to refer to the part he took in the development of the first railways, because its chief interest lies in his valiant attempt to secure for the railwaymen that leisure, without which intelligent citizenship is impossible.

It was during the thirties that the railroad first began to push its way in all directions across the fields of Britain. The part played by the Quaker Edward Pease in promoting the first line between Stockton and Darlington is historic. And there were other enterprising Friends, James Cropper at Liverpool, Edward Fry at Bristol, John Ellis at Leicester, who grappled with the practical problems connected with the new main lines of communication. Joseph Sturge and his brothers were doing this in regard both to the present Midland line between Birmingham and Gloucester, and to the London and Birmingham railway, now known as the London and North-Western. Of the last named, completed in 1838, George Stephenson was chief engineer, and Joseph Sturge, as one of the directors, at one time when the local contractor had failed, personally superintended the carrying through of one of the great cuttings that were necessary. But from the year 1835 the prevention of Sunday travelling, in the interests of the staff, was his chief concern on the board. Between 1836 and 1838 he brought up the question of entire closing on Sunday several times at both directors' and shareholders' meetings. One of these occasions was actually only a month later than his return from his labours in the West Indies. He was in no sense a sabbatarian, and the enlightened, though somewhat patronising, attitude which he took up may be judged from the following extracts from a report of one of his speeches on the subject:—

‘ He was no advocate for legislative enactments on this subject; and if he legislated at all, he would legislate as strictly for the rich as for the poor. But this was a very different question; it was whether a great trading company should employ their servants and carry on their business on Sundays.’ He pointed out the hardships of obliging the staff to work on Sunday without regard to their conscience or convenience, reading extracts from several memorials received from different classes of employees in favour of closing. ‘ It was well known,’ he went on to say, ‘ that even

the habit of putting on a clean dress once a week had a good moral effect on the working classes; but partial employment on the Sunday was found frequently to prevent not only this, but also the attendance at a place of worship. It should be recollected, moreover, that among the working classes Sunday was the great day for the education of their children; and the example of the parent leaving his house to attend to every-day employment must have a most injurious effect on his children.'

We feel, indeed, that he might have said more, by showing that without adequate leisure it is impossible for the wage-earner to educate himself sufficiently to take an intelligent part in the government of the country.<sup>1</sup> But such a consideration would have been a most imprudent one to advance before his fellow-capitalists in those days, and was probably omitted for that very reason. As it turned out, the motion for Sunday closing received a surprisingly large number of votes, but was of course rejected. Its author, feeling that the shareholders 'had decided upon a course which he conceived to involve an incalculable extent of moral evil,' resigned from the board of directors.

Meanwhile, in municipal government, Sturge was destined to come soon into close touch with the great popular agitation of the time—the Chartist movement. As early as 1830 he had been elected one of the 'Commissioners of the Birmingham Street Act'—an absurd body which had certain local powers before the Corporation Act of 1835. In 1838 the town at length received its charter; and Sturge, without any solicitation on his own part, and actually in his absence, was elected one of the sixteen new aldermen. At that time all members of the Town Council had to make a declaration not 'to injure or weaken the Protestant Church, as it is by law established.' Joseph and his brother Charles, as consistent opponents of church

<sup>1</sup> While these sheets are passing through the press, the good news arrives that the authorities have at last conceded to railway servants the principle, at any rate, of the eight-hour day.



establishments, together with an independent Anglican, refused to make this declaration, but were nevertheless accepted on the council.

It is interesting to notice a couple of incidents which must have assisted in the transference about this time of a large portion of Sturge's energies from the cause of the negro to that of the British wage-earner. The first of these is the partial breaking up of an Anti-slavery meeting in Birmingham by democratic interrupters who wished to move a resolution 'that slavery at home be first abolished.' And we find in the *Birmingham Journal* of September 15, 1838, a long letter addressed 'To Joseph Sturge Esq.,' alluding to the praise bestowed upon him for his successful part in the abolition of negro apprenticeship, and adding 'Would that I could induce you to become the professed and fearless advocate of *English* freedom!' The writer urges him to work to put an end to the misery of *white* slaves. The low wages of weavers, the corn laws, child labour, the new 'starvation Poor Law,' the game laws, etc., are adduced to point the necessity of universal suffrage, annual parliaments, and the ballot. 'Now, sir, what is the remedy for this appalling state of things, but that the honest voice of the working man be heard in the House of Commons?'

The distressing events of the year 1839, instead of driving Joseph Sturge into the frightened reaction, which infected most of his class, induced him to give a very active and warm-hearted response to the letter of this intelligent Chartist.

The great Reform Act had been a bitter disappointment to the bulk of the working people who had supported it. When it became evident that the Government, and the 'shopocracy' who had now secured votes, had no intention of extending the franchise further, the people felt they had been swindled and deluded. For at this time, and right up to the Act of 1867, about six-sevenths of the men of Britain were without votes. For the first four years after the passing of Reform these voteless masses kept quiet in

patient expectation during an interval of comparative trade prosperity. But in 1836 distress and unemployment set in, and added fuel to the flames of popular misery and discontent. The period 1837-42 represents probably the low-water mark of wretchedness reached by the people of England. The destitution that prevailed in town and country alike was indescribable. Food of all kinds was taxed. Wages ranged from 20s. weekly among the best paid factory hands to 8s. or even less in the case of the hand-loom weavers and agricultural labourers. Women as well as men worked from twelve to sixteen hours daily. The poorest class (to the number of some two millions) could not afford bread, but lived on potatoes and turnips; the better paid had to spend so large a proportion of their income on the taxed loaf, that meat, butter, cheese, and sugar were beyond their means. Housing was abominable, drains were almost non-existent. One-seventh of the population of Liverpool, one-tenth of that of Manchester lived in cellars. Blankets and bedding were often unobtainable luxuries. Many of the poor, huddled in crowded garrets, were said to sleep literally upon 'chopped dirt, the sweepings of a hen house mingled with a proportion of sparrows' nests.' Almost all that the Reform Parliament had done for them was to take away their pension of 'out-relief,' and substitute the deterrent harshness of the new Poor Law and its workhouse.

These terrible conditions united with the rising spirit of democracy to create a chaotic revolutionary movement, which, in the course of the year 1838, flared up from one end of the country to the other. In April of that year some earnest and level-headed Radicals drafted 'The People's Charter,' with its famous six points. These were briefly—manhood suffrage, voting by ballot, annual parliaments, abolition of the property qualification for members, payment of members, and equal electoral districts. But from the first behind the claim for unfettered democracy there lay the longing for better conditions of living, the ideal of a happy home for every man. In the manufacturing districts at any rate, Chartism was 'a cry of distress, the shout of men,



women, and children drowning in deep waters.' The official beginning of the organised movement dates from a monster meeting held in Birmingham, under the auspices of the revived Political Union, in August of 1838. A National Convention was elected to represent the people, and arrangements were made to collect signatures for a national petition on behalf of the Charter. But wilder, more desperate methods were proposed to overawe the hostility of the ruling classes. The idea of a 'sacred month'—a national strike of a month's duration—was spread abroad; and many of the more fiery leaders like Stephens and O'Connor openly advocated an armed rising. Arms were even collected and brandished at huge torch-light meetings. The upper and middle classes became panic-stricken. The Government made its plans to coerce the demonstrators with the military arm, but exhibited, on the whole, an unusual forbearance and restraint in not provoking outbreaks, though it turned a deaf ear to the demands for political freedom. In February, 1839, the National Convention met in London to concert plans. This body was already under the influence of the Irish demagogue Feargus O'Connor, the evil genius of the Chartist movement. His huge athletic physique, his fiery eloquence with its power of playing upon the varying shades of popular feeling, his able journalism in conducting the *Northern Star* newspaper gave him a following and a power, which none of his rivals attained. Yet he was self-seeking, intolerant, and unscrupulous, and his policy of 'physical force' was as ill-applied as it was ill-conceived. Half of it was probably brag and bluster, the idea of 'shaking our oppressors well over Hell's mouth.' However immoral and, in the circumstances of the time, futile such proposals were, the uneducated masses, helpless and despairing, were led away by them, and the saner methods and ideals of the 'moral force Chartists' were soon cast into the shade. It was indeed only natural that the belief in the efficacy of physical force to obtain their political rights should prevail among a people whose rulers had justified and even glorified the



organised violence of war, as the means of extending the dominions and influence of their country abroad.

Compared with London, Birmingham was a seething centre of enthusiasm, and accordingly the National Convention transferred, in May, 1839, its sittings to the midland town. Here, in a central open space still called the 'Bull Ring,' the people were accustomed to meet daily to listen to the appeals of their orators. The advent of the Convention naturally increased the excitement, which was raised to a fever heat in June, through the contemptuous rejection by the House of Commons of the monster national petition for the People's Charter. The mayor and magistrates became very frightened. They prohibited the use of the Bull Ring for meetings. This denial of free speech was resented, and meetings continued to be held. It does not however appear that at this time, or until July 4th, there was any real violence or disorder. At that period the new borough had not yet any police force of its own, and, apart from the military, the magistrates had only 'special' constables, sworn in for the occasion, and a few parish beables. So they decided to ask the Home Secretary for a body of the newly formed metropolitan police. On July 4th these officers arrived one hundred strong, and at once marched down to disperse the crowd of speakers and listeners in the Bull Ring. Here they used their truncheons with great effect, knocking down men right and left. The people fled; but, later on, aggravated and incensed by the violent and apparently unprovoked attack of the imported constables, they rallied and attacked them, causing injuries to about ten men. At last the soldiers appeared on the scene, cleared the streets, and arrested a number of the leaders.

During the next ten days, (so the committee appointed by the Town Council reported) 'the London police, inflamed with resentment at the treatment which they had experienced, seem to have acted as though something like martial law were in force—all civil rights utterly at an end, and the persons of the working people of this town

placed at their mercy: decent orderly mechanics, whilst walking along the streets on their lawful business, were rudely ordered "to move on"; some received blows to quicken their pace; others were knocked down. . . . outer doors were forced and houses entered, without lawful authority; and all this, when the town was in a state of perfect peace and order, if we except the violence of the police themselves and the angry excitement it necessarily occasioned.' This unprovoked brutality naturally incensed the people, whose indignation was further aroused by two new events, the prosecution of their admired leaders, Lovett and Collins, and the repeated refusal of Parliament, on July 12th, even to consider the national petition for the Charter. The natural result followed. On the evening of the 15th a mob collected, made a concerted attack upon the police in their headquarters, and were inspired by some evil spirits bent on destruction to attack the shops of some of the tradespeople, who seemed to represent their oppressors. There is said to have been little looting, but a huge bonfire was made upon which all manner of goods were heaped and burnt. Finally, before the soldiers arrived, (for the police were this time kept cautiously in their citadel), two dwelling houses were in flames.

During the weeks that culminated in this catastrophe, Alderman Sturge, we are told, frequently interposed in person to calm the excitement of the Bull Ring crowds, earnestly entreating them to beware of following the counsels of those who would incite them to violence. More than once, it seems, he was successful in this; for they respected the Quaker's quiet courage and were beginning to see that he was ready, far more than most of his class, to sympathise with their grievances and their demands. But of these efforts, unfortunately, no detailed accounts survive; it is only after the riot that we have evidence of the vigorous and enlightened position which the Quaker alderman adopted. His first anxiety was to save the lives of the four luckless persons, three men and a miserable boy, who were condemned to death as ringleaders in the riot.



A nephew, who survived until 1915, told the present writer that his first recollection of his uncle was the sight of him in his garden pasting together sheets of signatures petitioning for the reprieve of these unfortunates. The appeal was successful in so far that transportation for life was substituted for the death-sentence. Sturge then moved in the Town Council for the appointment of a committee to investigate the causes of the riot. This was done, and he was elected its chairman. This committee published, nine months later, a careful report in which, as we have already mentioned, they attributed a large share of the responsibility to the misconduct of the London police, and censured the magistrates for having made the services of these officers a subject of complimentary notice. Appended to the report is a note, which is so characteristic of the fearless Quaker principles of its author, that it is worth quoting here.

‘ Having signed the above Report, as Chairman of the Committee, I feel myself called upon, in my private character, in the first place to record my dissent from all such parts of the document, as either directly or indirectly sanction the use of mortal weapons, either by the police or the military; and, in the second place, to declare, in justice to the principles I hold, that the events which have occurred in this town during the last twelve months have, if possible, strengthened my conviction that, if the rule of “doing unto others as we would they should do unto us” pervaded the whole of our jurisprudence, the destruction of human life in any one case would soon be found to be as unnecessary as I consider it to be repugnant to Christianity and true national policy.

‘ JOSEPH STURGE.’

The enemies of democracy and of the Charter naturally made large capital out of the Birmingham riots. Though the damage to property was not widespread, the Duke of Wellington told the world (on partisan newspaper evidence) that the state of the town ‘was worse than that of a city taken by storm.’ The Whig Government and the wealthy citizens of Birmingham distrusted the Town Council,



which contained among its members more dangerous Radicals than even Joseph Sturge. So a measure was hurried through Parliament, which, though it compelled the council to raise a rate to support a police force, put the entire control of that force into the hands of a commissioner responsible only to the Home Office. These police were to be armed with sabres or cutlasses. The local indignation against the Police Act among the friends of the people was intense. The representative for Birmingham in Parliament said it 'would be the commencement of a system of *gendarmerie*, centred in London and spreading through every parish in England.' And it is recorded in the official *History of the Corporation* that Alderman Sturge asserted at a meeting of that body that 'for some days he could hardly express his feelings with anything like temper.' It was he who proposed the council's formal declaration 'emphatically protesting against the attempt to engraft one of the most pernicious institutions of continental tyranny on the English system of representation.' In November a large public meeting of protest was held at the Town Hall, under the auspices of a committee of which Sturge was chairman. It is evident that he was deeply moved by the injustice as well as by the folly of attempting to coerce the workers, who were asking for their natural rights in the government of the country. When, in the course of the meeting, a Chartist rose to move an amendment relating to the franchise, Sturge interposed successfully, pointing out the un wisdom of this, and offering to pay the expense of the Town Hall for a separate meeting on the franchise question. He then spoke at length in support of one of the principal resolutions. After describing the Police Act as the usurpation of despotic power by the corrupt House of Commons, he proceeded as follows:—

'He knew that there were so many alarmed at the present state of things that they were ready to give up a portion of their liberty for the sake of what they called security; but that security, it would be recollected, was to be procured by the introduction of an armed police, and by the adoption of

measures which alienated the feelings of the great mass of the working classes. They might suppress the expression of public opinion for a time, but they must be conscious that, without doing justice to the people, they were treading on a smothered volcano. He also knew there were some who considered that the few and the wealthy should govern the poor and the many; but he could not find in his Bible, either in the doctrine or the example of Him whom all Christians professed to follow, a single passage to justify such an opinion or such a practice. It was the conviction of a Christian duty which had brought him there that day, and which told him that he should resist by all possible means such measures as the Government Police Bill. He felt that he would not be obeying the injunctions of his Divine Master, "to love his neighbour as himself," if he did not use any little influence which he might possess to prevent encroachments upon the liberties of his country, though they might not affect him personally; and it was also his duty to advocate the rights of the poorest individual in the community to all the religious, civil, and political privileges of the wealthiest in the land. Some might be disposed to blame him for promoting meetings such as the present at this time, but he so far differed from them that he firmly believed the public and constitutional expression of popular opinion at the present eventful period was their greatest—he had almost said their only—safety.'

Then (in words which might have been used of the women's movement of more recent days) he turned to his 'working friends,' who comprised the greater part of the gathering, telling them that 'he felt indignant that they had been included in one sweeping condemnation because of the wicked and mad conduct of perhaps one in a thousand of the population, in the destruction of property in the town.' He pleaded for patience and order, saying it was the unexampled patience of the negroes that had done most to secure their emancipation in the West Indies. 'So they might rest assured with the blessing of Him, who could blast the mightiest means, and crown with the most signal success the feeblest effort. No! the cause of true freedom was not to be stopped in its onward course even by this formidable government police; and the peaceful claims



of the men of Birmingham would again be echoed by millions of their countrymen, in accents that should be heard by the Senate and the throne, till the equal rights of all should be fully achieved and secured, for they were all equal in the sight of God.'

This meeting, and the agitation of which it was a part, had, as might indeed have been expected from the disturbed state of England, no immediate effect upon a Government who were determined to resist the popular demands. But some two and a half years later, when Sir Robert Peel was Premier, the control of the borough police was handed back to the Town Council.

The determined rôle which Alderman Sturge played in protesting against the presence of the London police was a very important event in his career. For it brought him into intimate sympathy with the aspirations of the Chartists, so far as they kept clear of 'physical force,' and while alienating many of his middle-class friends, it endeared him to the working men of Birmingham in a way that Anti-slavery propaganda never could do. It was on the wave of popularity caused by the events of 1839—a popularity which he retained until it was spoilt by the impact of the Crimean War fever upon his pacifism—that he became for the first time a candidate for Parliament. During his absence in the north on Anti-slavery business he was adopted by a local committee for the by-election of January, 1840. As it happened, but few of the electors (who were not of course working men) showed signs of supporting him; so he retired, in order not to split the Radical vote. His election address, however, on this occasion is worth summarising, as it gives perhaps the most complete statement available of his political views.

In this document he begins by stating that he 'belongs to no party, inasmuch as he considers the Christian rule, of doing to others as we would that they should do unto us, is of universal application.' The planks of his programme are then given as follows:—



1. The severance of the connection between Church and State.
2. While he believes that employers should secure Sunday rest to their employees, he is opposed to the enforcement of it by law.
3. Universal free trade and the abolition of the taxes on the necessities of life.
4. A great extension of the elective franchise and no property qualification.
5. Shorter Parliaments.
6. Vote by ballot.
7. Abolition of capital punishment. War declared to be inconsistent with true national safety.
8. Abolition of slavery (by moral and pacific methods) in every part of the world.

On the vexed question of the new Poor Law he appears to have adopted a non-committal attitude, though he was opposed to the harsh way in which it was administered. It is a pity that he did not have the insight to condemn it more radically.

This programme probably represents the views which he held from this period until the end of his life, except that, as we shall see, he soon came to develop his opinions on popular representation into an advocacy of all the six points contained in the People's Charter.

## CHAPTER VI

## FREE TRADE AND COMPLETE SUFFRAGE

WE have no record left to us, as regards the year and a half following his first adoption as a candidate for Parliament, of any direct continuance of Joseph Sturge's connection with the great popular movement, which was still spreading its influence in all directions. This was no doubt largely due to his engrossment during this period with the Anti-slavery cause, and to his absence, in the spring and summer of 1841, on a visit to America in the interests of abolition. During 1840 he was also deeply exercised by the wickedness of the 'Opium War' with China. These matters will be described in later chapters; but it seems desirable to deal at this point with Sturge's association with the Anti-Corn-Law League, inasmuch as it was one of the leading preoccupations of his many-sided activity, during the three years following the autumn of 1838, when the League was founded at Manchester.

The taxes on imported corn and other foodstuffs were maintained by the landed interest, which controlled Parliament even after the passing of the Reform Act, in order to 'protect' British agriculture, that is to say, to keep up the landlords' rents. Their effect in raising prices contributed largely to create the misery in which the mass of the wage-earners were plunged. Happily for them and for the history of England, these taxes were also obnoxious to the new class of manufacturers, who were concerned to have food cheap and abundant enough to nourish a race of efficient workmen who did not require high wages to cover the bare cost of living. But there were also nobler ideals among the men who began in the late thirties to

preach the gospel of Free Trade. They believed that it was a sin to withhold a sufficiency of cheap food from a starving people, and that any arbitrary interference with the free course of international trade was in various ways immoral. Richard Cobden, the great apostle of the movement, wrote in 1838 to a friend 'that a moral, even a religious spirit might be infused into the question of the Corn Laws, and, if agitated in the same way that the question of slavery had been, it would be irresistible.' Later on we find him writing to urge the Quakers to take up Free Trade, as the best means of securing world peace. He saw that protective tariffs act as a constant irritant between nations and governments; and, if he had been living to-day, he would assuredly have been telling us that no League of Nations can be securely established without the accompanying condition of Free Trade between the states that compose it.

Sturge's Anti-Corn-Law enthusiasm was of the same high moral order as Cobden's and Bright's, but he was a corn merchant as well as a philanthropist; and there was with him, therefore, the additional motive (already mentioned on an earlier page<sup>1</sup>) of desiring to transform the vicious and speculative character of his own trade by rescuing the price of corn from dependence upon the chances of the British harvest. So it came about that he very soon deserted the protectionist tenets of his early days on the Gloucestershire farm, and gave his support to those few politicians who had the courage to attack the Corn Laws in the days before the great League. He was one of the first members of this organisation, and his acquaintance and subsequent friendship with Cobden and Bright date from this period. The leaders seem to have been anxious to secure a man of his tremendous energy and inflexible resolution, who was regarded as a hero by the Dissenters; and his services in the early and more critical days of the League were recognised by Cobden and others. As might be expected, Sturge, from the necessities of his nature,

<sup>1</sup>See pp. 21-2.



insisted upon the policy of demanding the *total and immediate* removal of the immoral taxation, and laboured to prevent the League from being deflected into any of the compromises which its more timid and diplomatic members were ready to adopt. He became a sort of warning conscience to the League—a conscience, whose wisdom was afterwards justified by the entire and early removal of the Corn Laws. Cobden, though sometimes irritated by his friend's excessive insistence, bears testimony to his good work. In a letter to Henry Richard in 1862 he writes as follows:—

‘ I remember at our first meeting of delegates from all parts of the kingdom, held in Manchester in the winter of 1838-9, (for the purpose of constituting the Anti-Corn-Law Association) the question had to be discussed as to the principle or articles of faith which should be adopted as a basis of our union. Mr. Sturge was there, and I have the impression that a few words from him did more than anything to determine us to adopt for our principle “ the total and immediate repeal ” of the Corn Law. I remember how little the great majority were prepared for anything so strong and uncompromising, and how gladly nine-tenths of us would have avoided the question at the time; but I believe that it was our late friend who, fresh from the experience of the Anti-slavery struggle, pointed out the necessity of taking our stand on the rock of abstract truth and justice; and I must say we found it our rock of safety during our seven years’ struggle.’

And we have a contemporary letter of Cobden to Sturge (dated February, 1841,) in which, after thanking him for a large donation to the cause, Cobden begs him to write a letter to the *Anti-Corn-Law Circular* exhorting their party to stand firm to the true principle of *immediate abolition*, with the promise of his co-operation as long as they do so; for ‘ such a letter from *you*,’ he says, ‘ would be a rallying point for all the good men and true, and would shame the wanderers, and bring them back to our ranks.’

We read too, in the *History of the League*, of a deputation somewhat earlier than this from the League to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, at which, after various

speakers had stressed the economic arguments for repeal, 'Joseph Sturge made a powerful appeal to the ministers, placing the whole question upon the eternal principles of justice and humanity, which, he said, were shamefully outraged by a tax on the food of the people.'

But Sturge was not destined to take any active share in the crusade during the years of the League's greatest popularity and of its ultimate triumph, when the Irish famine and the brave wisdom of Peel had come to its aid. It appears that, after about the middle of the year 1841, he decided that the work of the League was not worthy of a foremost place in his affections. This was due to two quite distinct reasons. The first, which we shall discuss briefly in a later chapter, was the decision of the League to work for the introduction into the British market of *slave-grown* sugar on the same terms as 'free-labour' sugar. The second, and in its immediate effect the more important reason, was Sturge's adoption, in the course of the year 1841, of the view that the franchise reform demanded by the Chartists was a more urgent issue, and one more likely to be successful, than the repeal of the Corn Laws.

As related elsewhere, Sturge was touring the eastern states of America on Anti-slavery business from April to August, 1841, and we have in his journal and letters some indication of how his mind was working towards the opening of his Chartist campaign, which took place very shortly after his return.<sup>1</sup> We find him expressing admiration for the social and moral conditions of the manufacturing city of Lowell, Massachusetts, which were far in advance of those to be found in British towns. And the comment in his journal is this, 'It is quite evident that the statesman who would elevate the moral standard of our working population must begin by removing the physical depression and destitution in which a large proportion of them, without any fault of their own, are compelled to drag out a weary and almost hopeless existence.' And it is clear that he had now come to the conclusion (erroneously

<sup>1</sup> See also the poem quoted on p. 103.

as it turned out) that the privileged classes would never give up their Corn Laws unless compelled to do so by a truly democratic Parliament, such as the Chartists demanded. While in America, he had sent a Chartist pamphlet to the great Channing, in the hope of enlisting his sympathy for their cause. We have the reply sent to him by the wise Unitarian, containing a prayer that from among the Chartist leaders there might arise men deeply imbued with the spirit of Christ and with a passion for the enlightenment of the masses. And on his return to England he wrote to Cobden as follows:—

‘I have been driven to the conclusion, that it is not only hopeless to expect justice for the labouring population from the representatives of the present constituencies, but that the infatuated policy which now guides our rulers will be persisted in, until they plunge millions into want and misery, if [they do] not bring them into a premature grave. I therefore think that the time is arrived when every friend of humanity, of whatever class, sect, or party, should endeavour to obtain and secure for the people a just and permanent control over their own affairs.’

The writer of these words had certainly full justification for such strong expressions. The starvation and misery, which we have already described as prevalent at the time of the Birmingham riots, still covered the face of the land. The demand for the People’s Charter and the vague longings for betterment which the Charter symbolised were still giving rise to tumultuous agitation. It was a moment when the Chartist movement seemed to have come once more to the parting of the ways, one road being that of moral persuasion and peaceable demonstrations, the other that of armed revolt, or at any rate of threats in that direction. The fierce O’Connor had just come out of prison, to recommence his career as a popular hero, preaching physical force. But, on the other hand, a number of the finest spirits, who had at first had leanings to more violent methods, had been taught by experience the need of educational and moralising influences among the ignorant



millions. In particular Arthur O'Neill at Birmingham and Henry Vincent at Bath had established 'churches' for what might be described as Christian and Temperance Chartism. Joseph Sturge felt a peculiar mission to hold up the hands of noble men of this stamp, and to attempt to wean the Chartists generally from their adherence to the blustering violence of O'Connor and his group. At the same time he had high hopes of persuading a large section of the religious-minded middle classes to see the justice and wisdom of granting the popular demands, and to unite in securing them. In both these objects his failure was more conspicuous than his success; yet he was certainly the right man to make the trial. Cobden, though regretting his withdrawal from the League activities, agreed as to this. 'You have,' he writes, 'so much of established reputation to fall back upon, that your standing with the middle class would not be endangered by a course which might peril the character and endanger the usefulness of most others.'

In 1841, Edward Miall, the apostle of 'disestablishment,' founded the *Nonconformist* newspaper, and began to publish a series of able articles under the title of *Reconciliation between the Middle and Labouring Classes*. Sturge felt at once that he had secured the right ally. He assisted in the republication of these articles in pamphlet form. The pamphlet, which had a great circulation, was prefaced with a brief introduction from his pen, in which he set out the principles of Christian equity that required the abolition of class legislation. Apart from this, his first public step was in November of 1841, when, at the close of a meeting of Anti-Corn-Law deputies at Manchester, he gathered a largely attended conference, with the veteran Radical wire-puller Francis Place in the chair, at which he proposed the initiation of a movement to secure for the people 'the fair, full, and free exercise of the elective franchise.' A declaration of faith was drawn up, a central bureau was established in Birmingham, and signatures of electors and non-electors flowed in from all parts of the country. The prospects of the new movement seemed very promising—

indeed delusively so—for two reasons. On the one hand a number of decided checks to the Free Trade agitation diverted a large number of the middle class into temporary adherence to franchise reform. On the other hand a rallying ground was found for all the ablest ‘moral force’ Chartists, Vincent, O’Neill, Lovett, O’Brien, Collins, and others, who were trying to stem the infection of Feargus O’Connor’s influence. By March, 1842, fifty or sixty towns in Great Britain had formed ‘Complete Suffrage Unions.’ In April a general conference of eighty-seven delegates, selected so as to secure about equal proportions of middle-class and working-class men, was held in Birmingham under the presidency of Joseph Sturge. There is no doubt that his personality was the pivot of the whole movement. John Bright was there, several of the Chartist leaders, Sharman Crawford, M.P., the one vigorous advocate of the movement in the Commons, and other men of note. The meetings appear to have been characterised by a surprising degree of harmony and enthusiasm, considering the distrust between middle and working class politicians which was almost universal at the time. It seemed a real day of reconciliation. The resolution adopted was as follows:—

‘That an association be now formed, to be entitled “The National Complete Suffrage Union,” and that the following be its object: The creating and extending of an enlightened public opinion in favour of the principle and necessary details of complete suffrage, viz. the extension of the elective franchise to every man twenty-one years of age who has not been deprived of his citizenship in consequence of a verdict of his countrymen; the abolition of the property qualification for members of parliament; the adoption of voting by ballot; the dividing of the country into equal electoral districts; the payment of all the legal election expenses, and of a reasonable remuneration to members of parliament; and that annual parliaments are a proper means for securing responsibility of members to their constituents.’

This basis included all the six main points of the People’s Charter. This was its strength; its weakness was that it shelved the question, as to whether or not the *name* of the

Charter should be adopted to describe the objects of the Union. This was, as we shall see, the rock upon which the movement was wrecked.

A few days after the conference, Sharman Crawford brought forward a Complete Suffrage motion in the Commons, and received rather lukewarm support from seventy-four members. Meanwhile the unseating, for bribery and corruption, of the two Whig members for Nottingham (of whom one was the ex-Radical John Cam Hobhouse) provided the reformers with a favourable opportunity of testing their influence over the middle-class electors. The Whig and Tory caucuses in London, as it happened, agreed to support Walter, the proprietor of the *Times* newspaper, in contesting the vacancy. There was great local indignation; and at a meeting of electors a requisition, signed by over seven hundred of them, was drawn up, asking Joseph Sturge to stand as the popular candidate.

It is evident that the Quaker Chartist's personality must at this time have been familiar in many parts of the kingdom. In the previous year there had been a proposal to bring him forward as a parliamentary candidate for Edinburgh. That idea fell through, but Sturge accepted the Nottingham nomination under the very unusual conditions that 'no money be spent, or any improper influence be used to bias a single vote in my favour; and that, in the event of my return to Parliament, if I find from experience that I could not conscientiously retain my seat, or that I could be more serviceable to my country by resigning it, I shall be at liberty to do so.' The spirit in which he entered upon the contest is further illustrated by the following passage in a letter which he wrote to John Bright in May, 1842, while the campaign was in progress:—

'I am aware that some friends are judging me for what they consider my extreme views. Indeed from the mad and wicked conduct of some of the Chartists, Chartism is viewed by many with the same horror as Abolitionism is in America; so much are good principles often damaged in their progress by bad advocates.



‘ I am only reconciled to standing for Nottingham as a test of *purity of election*, and probably, if returned, may not stay there a month. I deeply feel that the position in which I stand is one of peculiar danger and difficulty, and I hope thou and all my kind friends will watch over me and give me a word of advice when they see me take, or likely to take, a false step.’

Popular oratory was not one of Joseph’s gifts—and yet he clearly had a remarkable hold over his audiences, and the statement of his wise sister Sophia (who on this occasion left Birmingham to be with her brother through the fray) is probably a correct judgment. ‘ Badly,’ she writes to a friend, ‘ as he often expresses himself on common occasions, under the influence of deep feeling he becomes almost eloquent.’ His addresses are usually rather ponderous reading, with few light touches. Yet a passage such as the following from his speech at the Nottingham nomination is telling and almost humorous. (He is alluding in it to the position of his wealthy opponent, as owner of the *Times*.)

‘ But you are told that I will not make any pecuniary sacrifice for you. It is true I told you that I would not give you sixpence for your votes, and I repeat it. . . . Whilst I abhor bribery, and whilst I would warn you to beware of the briber, I consider the rich man who offers the bribe to be a greater criminal than the poor man who accepts it. I am glad that we have to fight this great battle first in Nottingham, and that our opponent is the leviathan of the public press. First, because in Nottingham, though it is renowned for its contests in favour of liberty, yet, from the revolting disclosures which have lately taken place, it is evident that all that a profuse expenditure by both the political parties could accomplish has been done to corrupt the constituents; and secondly, because I wish the strength of our principles to be contested with one who wields a power, in comparison with which that of the greatest potentate on earth dwindles into insignificance. It was said by Sheridan, in the House of Commons, at a time when Napoleon was in the plenitude of his power, “ Bonaparte may withstand all the artillery of the enemy in front of his army, but he cannot withstand the silent but more powerful artillery of the pen.” Sheridan afterwards went on to describe, with

that eloquence for which he was so celebrated, the fall of the liberties of a people one by one before the power of despotism, and then exclaimed, "But leave me only the liberty of the press. With this mighty engine I would destroy the fabric of corruption, and build on its ruins the rights and privileges of the people." But now, how are the mighty fallen! Sheridan perhaps little thought that the day would come when the London newspaper press would become so venal that, with a little exception, the people look in vain for an uncompromising and an unpaid advocacy through its channels. And what has been the consequence? Why, that this press has so justly lost the confidence of the people, that he who controls the most powerful engine in the world is now carrying on a contest, with not very sanguine hopes of success, with an individual without political or family influence, and whom he called in derision, through the columns of the *Times* but a few months ago, "the Birmingham Quaker Chartist." If our principles should triumph here, with such fearful odds against them, it may, indeed, animate with lively hope every constituency in the kingdom.'

This speech had begun with an uncompromising declaration of the creed that 'as all men are equal, they are entitled to an equality of civil, religious, and political privileges,' followed by a statement of his programme, which was very similar to that already quoted in connection with the Birmingham by-election of 1839, except that he now adopted the six points of the People's Charter, in accordance with the Complete Suffrage manifesto. He advocated 'the transfer of the taxes upon industry and the necessaries of life to the real property of the country.' He also confessed to being an advocate of 'teetotalism,' though he would only convert people by force of persuasion to that practice.

The contest thus opened was a strenuous and a singular one. It was immensely complicated, from Sturge's point of view, by the appearance of the redoubtable Feargus O'Connor with a body of Chartist orators and agents. O'Connor had just previously been abusing him as a cunning tool of the Anti-Corn-Law bourgeois, but at Nottingham he chose to appear as his patron and actually had the



audacity to send him in a large bill for the payment of his speakers.<sup>1</sup> But in spite of the introduction of this potential element of corruption and disorder, Sturge seems to have been able to preserve to a very great extent the purity of election, at which he aimed. This is the testimony of Henry Vincent, one of the best and ablest of the Chartist leaders:—

‘I was with Joseph Sturge all through the Nottingham election. The moral effect of that contest was astonishing. In a town long accustomed to bribery, not a shilling was expended improperly, order reigned, virtue was extolled; the people for the time seemed as if they were swayed by an almost superhuman influence. I have seen him in stormy assemblies, and have remarked the influence of his very presence in stilling clamour, and in calling forth the noblest sympathies of the people.’

The result of the poll was declared as 1885 votes for Walter and 1801 for Sturge. This was justly regarded as a moral victory, especially as Walter was subsequently unseated as the result of a petition. Sturge, who had recently incurred financial losses which made attention to his business necessary, decided not to stand again. One of his followers in the Complete Suffrage movement was adopted in his place and won the seat against the son of the unseated candidate.

Unhappily this initial success represented the high-water mark of Complete Suffrage. Somewhat later in the same summer there broke out, as a result of the popular misery, the so-called ‘plug plot,’ which was in effect a spontaneous anticipation of the ‘sympathetic general strike’ advocated by syndicalists to-day. It was of course suppressed by the Government, not without loss of life. And as usual there was a reaction of fear among the timid middle-class adherents of reform. Some of these began to desert, and most of the others were not in a mood for any generous co-operation with the militant Chartists. A second and larger conference of the Suffrage Union was however held

<sup>1</sup> O’Connor was perhaps looking forward to his own candidature. In 1847 he succeeded in getting himself returned for this constituency and appearing as a solitary Chartist in the Commons.



at Birmingham during the last week of 1842. Sturge again presided, and this time O'Connor himself managed to secure admission as a delegate, along with a good many of the more extreme Chartists. The chairman did his best to act as a reconciling force, but it was a moral impossibility—the circumstances of the time made the continued co-operation of respectable Radical bourgeois and resentful workmen out of the question, save by a miracle. The deep-seated division of opinion showed itself in the apparently superficial question of the choice of a name for their agreed political programme. The middle-class delegates chose *The Bill of Rights*; and Sturge, realising that the violent associations of the term *Charter* would make impossible any acquiescence on their part in its retention, felt bound to support this view. In doing so he alienated the whole Chartist body, who, putting aside past antagonisms, rallied to support their sacred watchword of *The People's Charter*. Painful recriminations followed.<sup>1</sup> A vote was taken, and the advocates of the Charter as an appellation won the day by a majority of two to one. This made a breach inevitable. Sturge, who doubtless felt that co-operation with the O'Connorites would in any event be of short duration, sorrowfully accompanied most of the middle-class delegates in their withdrawal from the room, and the two sections continued their deliberations apart. The attempt at class-reconciliation had failed.

We may pause a moment to record what some may regard as the most striking fact connected with the Suffrage Union—it served as a political apprenticeship for the youthful philosopher Herbert Spencer. He attended the conference just described, as an enthusiastic delegate from Derby. His sympathies were with the Sturgeites, as they were called, and he kept in touch with the movement until some two years later, when Sturge appointed him as

<sup>1</sup>The writer was interested to discover that his maternal great-grandfather, Lawrence Heyworth, afterwards M.P. for Derby, was the delegate who brought matters to a crisis by calling the Chartist spokesmen 'the greatest tyrants in existence,' adding that 'it is not your principles we dislike, but your leaders.'

assistant editor to the *Pilot*, a newly-launched Suffrage and Peace paper. However, after a few weeks, possibly owing to his rationalistic views, Spencer was liberated to take up a surveying post on the Birmingham and Gloucester Railway, with which the Sturges were connected. All this is described in a chapter of the philosopher's *Autobiography*. Spencer passed some days as guest of the Quaker, and gives the following description of him at this period:—

‘I retain a clear recollection of his remarkable face, uniting, in an unusual way, great kindness with great firmness; beneath an overhanging brow, eyes expressive of much sympathy, and then a very massive chin. The determination implied by the massive chin took the form of unyielding pursuit of his benevolent aims. . . . He is one of the most lovable kind of men in his social and domestic character that I have yet come in contact with; perfectly open, simple, and amiable, he is as genuine a Christian, in the practical sense of the term, as could well be imagined.’<sup>1</sup>

Hardly daunted by the distressing failure of the December conference, Sturge toiled on during 1843 in advocacy of popular representation, and we hear of his addressing public meetings on the subject at Hull, Halifax, Huddersfield, and Derby. Sharman Crawford continued to lead the attack in Parliament, Miall in the columns of the widely read *Nonconformist*. But the movement was languishing sadly. The more ardent of the working classes fell increasingly under the glamour of O'Connor, with his terrorist threats and well-meant but ill-contrived schemes of land-settlement; while a returning wave of trade prosperity diverted the great bulk of the masses from politics to the now more hopeful struggle for their daily bread.<sup>2</sup> The interests of the middle-class liberals, on the other hand, were drawn into the Free Trade movement, which was rapidly marching to victory under the generalship of Cobden and Bright.

In July, 1844, there was another by-election in Birming-

<sup>1</sup> Herbert Spencer's *Autobiography*, I. p. 251.

<sup>2</sup> Thus the average minimum expenses per week of a working-class family of five for the same amount of breadstuffs were reduced from 7s. 6d. in 1839 to 5s. 8d. in 1849, while wages rose.



ham. Sturge was adopted as candidate on the suffrage issue by a crowded town's meeting, but one consisting mainly, as might be expected, of voteless men. Many of the middle-class electors were sympathetic, but failed him when it came to the point of voting, and his name appeared at the bottom of the poll with less than 350 votes. This disaster in his own city convinced Sturge that the National Complete Suffrage Union was moribund. Sadly he laid down this particular burden, and ceased to take any prominent part in the propaganda of franchise reform, though, as we shall see, he retained his convictions and was ready to express them to the end.

The Chartist movement failed, because it was premature. The wage-earning class lacked the experience and wisdom necessary to secure good organisation and trustworthy leadership. Yet society has gained by its blunders. It was a new precedent to have a movement controlled and engineered by working men; and by making the cry of the poor intensely articulate, it speeded up social legislation. It may also be regarded as 'the unconscious parent of continental Social Democracy.'<sup>1</sup>

The political programme of Chartism has already been all but realised. Five out of the six points of the Charter are now either actually or practically the law of the land. Yet, under nineteenth century conditions none of these measures could be secured until the terrorism of the Chartist name had passed away, as it had in the later fifties and sixties. Then another Quaker democrat took the field; and in his great suffrage campaigns, that lasted from 1858 to 1867, John Bright was the chief instrument in effecting that union between the middle and working classes, the pressure of which secured from Disraeli the principle, not indeed of adult, but of household suffrage. Whatever political value Sturge's work for Complete Suffrage had, was in the direction of paving the way for the reconciliation

<sup>1</sup> It is worthy of remark that in an appeal recently issued, over Lenin's signature, by the Russian *Soviet* Government, Englishmen are addressed as 'Comrades ! Descendants of the great Chartists !'



of these later years. Consciously or subconsciously, many of those who fought the fight of 1866-7 must have retained impressions of the goodwill of which the Complete Suffrage Union had been the outward sign.<sup>1</sup>

To the permanent moral and religious value of the movement there is strong testimony. The Christian Church has been so constantly guilty of refusing justice and liberty to the oppressed, that it was extraordinarily wholesome to have a man of deep piety publicly proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus as the true foundation for popular rights and repeatedly emphasising the distinctively Christian grounds on which his programme rested. The name of Christ could no longer be blasphemed in ignorance and innocence, as it could be when no outspoken Christian dared to plead the cause of the people. It was said, probably with truth, that there were quite a number of instances of working men who were drawn back into a respect for Christianity by contact with Sturge's personality. We will quote again from a letter of Henry Vincent, one of the sanest of the popular leaders.

'The suffrage movement of which Joseph Sturge was the soul did good in everything. It brought about a better feeling between the middle and working classes, and allayed the fiercer exasperation of the people, by proving that men of Christian character were willing to risk popularity with the wealthy and powerful in their desire to serve them. It pushed men of high character into prominence, and breathed, for the first time since the return of the Stuarts, a Christian principle into political action. It raised many men in sobriety by its moral appeals. . . . Many men there are [too], whom I need not name, now living useful lives, who may be called his political children.'

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Sturge's enterprise is assured a lasting place in the history of the Chartist movement, owing to the fact that three recent books by scientific historians treat at some length Complete Suffrage and the part he played in it.

See *The Rise of Democracy* by J. Holland Rose (1912), *The Chartist Movement* by Mark Hovell (1918), and a German work, *Geschichte des Sozialismus in England*, by Max Beer (1913). The autobiography of the Chartist, Thomas Cooper, provides a very graphic picture of Sturge at this time.

We must now turn to illustrate the difficulties with which this apostle of democracy had to contend in the religious Society whose fundamental principles and whose members were dear to him in many ways. Only by doing so can we estimate truly the heroic side of his character, for to nearly every man to be wounded in the house of his friends is the bitterest trial of all.

There are numerous Quakers to-day who believe that the faith which they profess is the natural ally of both democracy and socialism. But the Society, to which they belong, has, at any rate since the time of the French Revolution, not been distinguished as a whole (apart from its Anti-slavery enthusiasm) for its advocacy of popular rights. During the first half of the nineteenth century its influence was very distinctly in the opposite direction, so much so that the activities of Joseph Sturge, with which we are now dealing, were by many of his fellow Quakers regarded as *the* great error of his life. Can we trace some of the special causes which contributed to this lack of enlightenment?

Tom Paine, with his devotee Cobbett, had been the prophet of early nineteenth century Radicalism. And Paine, besides being the author of *The Rights of Man*, had also written *The Age of Reason*, a somewhat crude attack on orthodox Christianity. So it came about that, in most people's minds, radical democracy was associated with 'infidelity,' just as in more recent times socialism has been tarred with a similar brush. Further, Paine's father was a Norfolk Quaker and he was brought up under Quaker influence. Cobbett used to say that he was the only great man the sect had ever produced.

Here we have one consideration which had planted in Joseph Sturge's Quaker contemporaries a rooted distrust of democratic enthusiasm. If we add to this their quietist objection to politics, as detracting from inward piety, and their natural middle class prejudices against anything subversive of the existing social order, we can imagine how deeply most of them would misunderstand, and how

keenly they would resent the assumption by one of their number of leadership in the Radical and Chartist cause.

Joseph Sturge stood almost alone in the Society in his political association with the Chartists. There was one notable exception in the person of 'Long Forster' of Bradford, the son of William Forster, Joseph's spiritual guide. The future Education Minister and Irish Secretary was soon, however, to abandon most of the tenets of the Friends; and their hostility can hardly have hurt him as it hurt the loyal heart of the older man. They reasoned with him, they wrote him letters of remonstrance and warning, some affectionate, but some harsh and galling. They objected to him in his own Meeting, as unfitted to take part in Church affairs. When the Yearly Meeting of 1843 committed itself to the admonition 'We trust Friends may always be found among those who are quiet in the land,' it was probably directed as much against the revolutionary Joseph as it was against John Bright, the Anti-Corn-Law agitator. Worst of all, they were moved to preach against his works in the solemn time of public worship. 'Amid such a scene of conflict as Joseph has entered upon,' writes his sister, 'one hardly dares glance into the future—so much trial, so many dangers await him. He is already beginning to feel the shyness of friends, and at one monthly meeting there was an ebullition of something more.' And again, at the time of the Nottingham election, Sophia expresses herself thus:—

'I think Joseph is becoming less sensitive (I do not say hardened) to the reproach of his friends. I was delighted to meet his bright countenance in the lobby after Meeting last fourth-day, after hearing a sermon which all must perceive was intended to reprove him.'

The firm but humble spirit in which Sturge met the protests of his friends is perhaps best expressed, in default of later evidence, in a letter which he wrote in 1839 in answer to a remonstrance against his conduct in championing popular liberties against the London police.



'I am much obliged, my dear brother, for thy kind and friendly advice about the police affair, and not the less so because I cannot agree with thee in opinion. If we talked the matter over together, there is probably one point of principle on which we might differ considerably. I believe thou art inclined increasingly to doubt the propriety of Christians taking any part in political matters; while I am rather increasingly of opinion that they are not only justified, but that, when called upon by their fellow-citizens, they are bound to do so, unless it interfere with other and paramount claims upon them, or unless the position in which it places them *necessarily* involves a compromise of religious principle. But granting that I was not wrong in accepting a seat in the corporation, I think I could show thee pretty strong reasons why it was my duty to pursue the course I have with regard to the Government Police Bill. I was perfectly aware that by doing so I should expose myself to a good deal of censure from many quarters. But in reviewing what I have done, while I am too conscious of my great weakness and many infirmities to suppose that I have in all cases, both in word and manner, adopted the best mode of conveying my sentiments, I can see no ground to believe that I have been acting contrary to my Christian duty in the general course I have pursued. It is not the first time on which I have felt that, in following that line of apprehended duty, I must be prepared, if needful, to sacrifice the approbation of some wise and good men; and all I would ask of those whom I love and esteem, and whose good opinion I would not needlessly forfeit, is that they would not be biassed by mere prejudiced or newspaper statements, but suspend their judgments till they really know the facts, so as to be able to understand the merits of the case. What has lately got into some of the papers reminds me strongly of the censures cast upon me by the colonial pro-slavery press during our late Anti-slavery struggle. I am sorry to say that amongst some of the middle and higher class with us there is a feeling almost as bitter towards the working classes as there was towards the slave by the slave-owners. . . . I know the dangerous path in which I am treading, and in the midst of its difficulties and temptations it is, indeed, a comfort to know that thou and some others are watching over me for good, and that, when you think it is needful, you will not withhold a word of faithful admonition and counsel.'

It remains to refer briefly to a few incidents in Sturge's career after the collapse of the Complete Suffrage Union, which show that he continued to his last day a consistent friend of British liberty.

Many of the Chartist leaders were prosecuted and imprisoned by the authorities on more or less justifiable pretexts. Sturge continued to befriend them, aiding them with money after their release and in other ways. We have a moving letter written from Stafford County Gaol by O'Neill, in which he thanks the brothers Sturge for the gift of a reference Bible, and expresses the joy which God had given to him in his prison cell.

So moribund was the Chartist movement by 1848, that the amazing Continental revolutions of that year only succeeded in galvanising it into a last flicker of life. The successful proclamation of the French Republic, with but little bloodshed, in February stirred up for the time much generous democratic and international enthusiasm in British hearts; and Sturge was one of the foremost to welcome the event. We find him speaking at a meeting, held in the Birmingham Town Hall with a Chartist in the chair, to express sympathy with the French. And at a similar gathering in London he presided himself, and congratulated 'our brethren in France' on achieving a glorious independence. An address to the provisional Government of the Republic was framed, and Sturge with four others was deputed to proceed to Paris to present it. This was done; and Lamartine himself as Foreign Minister made a cordial speech in reply. The new Government had decreed the abolition both of capital punishment for political offences and of colonial slavery. Sturge rejoiced at these enlightened measures, and his visit was doubtless designed to encourage their retention in practice.

At the general election of the preceding year he had been once more an unsuccessful parliamentary candidate, this time for the city of Leeds. He had been especially selected as being a resolute opponent of the Conservative proposals for giving state aid to denominational schools. The contest



was of no great interest, but his programme was of course a democratic one; and he showed his loyalty to principle by refusing to stand, unless invited not only by some of the few electors, but by a public meeting of the inhabitants. He did not expect to succeed, but appears to have welcomed the occasion, particularly as an opportunity of laying before the people the great Christian principle of international peace, which was at that time perhaps his chief concern.

His correspondence with Cobden and Bright during the closing decade of his life proves his continued devotion to the principle of Manhood Suffrage. In 1857 he writes to Cobden maintaining that this principle 'involves more than a mere shibboleth, and is, I believe, of far more importance than your having *total* abolition of the Corn Laws as your point in the Anti-Corn-Law agitation.' Cobden had described complete suffrage as a shibboleth, and in a letter to Henry Richard which dates from this year, he begged him not to be drawn into any dogmatic theory about it—'it is our friend Sturge's bantling, and he has an overwhelming love for it.' In 1858, six months before his death, we again find Sturge trying to convince Bright of the superior justice of manhood suffrage compared with one based on a rating or household qualification. Bright preferred in this case to be an opportunist, saying he was 'working for success, not for failure.' None the less Sturge rejoiced, in his last days, at being able to take a leading part in securing Bright to contest the Birmingham constituency on the principle of household suffrage. He was doubtless stirred to the bottom of his heart while listening to the magnificent outbursts of reasoned eloquence, with which Bright opened in this Birmingham campaign the movement for Reform destined within ten years to secure the first instalments of the old Chartist programme.

One notable and successful effort for the cause of *religious* liberty may fitly conclude this long chapter. In 1850 the Pope issued an apostolic letter re-establishing and extending the Catholic faith in England by creating twelve new episcopal sees under the Archbishop of Westminster. A



storm of furious anti-papal feeling swept over Britain, fed naturally by the jealousy of the Established Church, and carrying away many of the Dissenters also. Joseph Sturge was one of the few resolute friends of religious freedom who stood firm against the epidemic of prejudice. When a town's meeting at Birmingham was called to urge the Government to stamp out the Roman aggression, he took the lead in organising a counter-movement, and issued a printed letter, asking the friends of toleration to 'attend and negative proceedings that are dangerous to religious freedom.' The meeting was held amid intense excitement. It is said to have lasted from twelve o'clock to six, with over eight thousand persons present. A memorial to the Queen was proposed, denouncing the Pope and urging Government interference. Later on the calm Quaker rose to move the opposition amendment, 'We respectfully, yet earnestly, deprecate,' it ran, 'all restrictions upon the free enjoyment by every religious body within your Majesty's dominions of its spiritual order and discipline.' His speech was a monument of quiet common-sense. 'All I ask,' he is reported as saying, 'is that you should give your Catholic fellow-subjects the same freedom that you enjoy yourselves and which you would give to every member of the community. My friend who seconded the address [a Wesleyan] complained of the Pope having divided the kingdom into ecclesiastical districts, but I would ask him whether the members of his own persuasion have not done the same. Aye, even the little denomination to which I belong have their meeting house in Westminster, although we have not yet arrived at the dignity of a Cardinal. You may depend upon it that it is not from abroad that you are to fear danger, but from within your own boundaries; for I am one of those who believe that our danger lies in the connection between Church and State. I am told, on high authority, that one half of our army is composed of Roman Catholics. Would you deprive them of their religious freedom, as they have deprived themselves of their civil? I wish to say, emphatically, that it is against systems, not

against persons, that we are contending, because I rejoice to believe that there are true Christians to be found in every denomination; but I implore you not to judge of Churches by those systems which originate in human invention, but to go to the New Testament, and you will find that you are to correct errors of opinion, not by law and persecution, but by the exercise of Christian charity and love.'

As a result of this intervention and the subsequent debate, the meeting ended in a kind of (verbal) drawn battle, and its object was thus defeated. We have Cobden's testimony that Birmingham was the first to give a check to the wave of popular intolerance. It is true that the Government were subservient enough to pass the restrictive *Ecclesiastical Titles Bill*, but its edge was blunted and it was never enforced.

This stormy episode was one of the occasions, in regard to which the profound comment was afterwards made, that to see Joseph Sturge address a hostile public meeting was to receive a new idea—one seemed to see the eternal life of Charity in action under human limitations.

## CHAPTER VII

## THE CRUSADE AGAINST AMERICAN SLAVERY

IF we could have inspected Joseph Sturge's diary, at almost any period between the fortieth and sixtieth year of his life, it would, we think, have revealed a practically continuous succession of engagements connected with a quite remarkable variety of interests—all, except his corn-business, of a purely altruistic character. Apart from his constant reserves of good-will, his wonderful and unwearying vitality of body and mind puts us to shame in these days of nervous breakdowns. He had, it is true, his recreations—morning rides on horseback, the society of children, and the care of pet animals. But we do not hear either of holidays or of illness, before the time of the Crimean War. His various journeys to America and the Continent were all undertaken for the sake of weighty and often very difficult enterprises; not chiefly for interest and refreshment, as was the case with the foreign travel of his friends Cobden and Bright.

Amid the shifting phases of his activities, political, civic, educational, pacifist, faithfulness to the cause of the oppressed negro was probably the most persistent of all. We have already written of his life-long interest in the West Indies. Even before the final triumph of emancipation in those colonies, he was beginning to think and work for the world-wide extinction of slavery. As far back as 1833, we find him writing to William Forster proposing that a Society should be formed for the universal abolition of slavery, so as to promote 'a general crusade against the accursed system throughout the civilised world.' Three years later, at a meeting of the Baptist Missionary Society,



he alluded to the continued horrors of the Atlantic slave-trade, which only existed because of the maintenance of slavery in the American States, and he pleaded for a British movement to encourage the faithful band of abolitionists across the water and to convince the professing Christian Churches there of their enormous guilt in upholding the iniquity. Shortly after this, a prominent Methodist minister, who was proved to have been specially involved in this guilt, came over from the States to attend a general Conference of the Wesleyan body. Sturge felt it his duty on this occasion to open the eyes of the Conference to the conduct of their American brethren in justifying the slave-holder and persecuting the abolitionist.

And when Birmingham was at length celebrating the final act of the West Indian drama in August, 1838, by a gathering of Anti-slavery leaders from various parts of the kingdom, Joseph Sturge, the hero of the day, did not rest, like most of the other speakers, upon the laurels already won, but directed the attention of his vast audience almost exclusively to the work which there yet remained to do.

The necessary preliminary to more extended action was the formation of a new society with a wider scope; for the old Anti-slavery organisation had been practically dissolved. This task occupied Sturge's energies, amid the distractions of the growing Anti-Corn-Law and Chartist movements, during 1838-9. The 'British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society' was founded 'for the Universal Extinction of Slavery and the Slave Trade, the protection of the rights and interests of the enfranchised populations in the British Possessions and of all persons captured as slaves, by the employment of moral, religious, and pacific methods only.'<sup>1</sup> The work of this vigorous Society in its

<sup>1</sup> The Society, which has of recent years assumed the 'protection of aborigines' as an additional function, is still in active operation. It has, for example, done good work in connection with the 'contract slaves' of the Portuguese colonies; and is now devoting much attention to the revolting system of *peonage*. In the current year (1918) it has championed the land rights of the native races in

earlier years fell naturally into four chief spheres, which may be summarised briefly. Firstly there was the securing of emancipation in other parts of the British dominions; secondly, efforts were made to induce other European governments, and especially that of France, to liberate their slaves; thirdly, there was the difficult question of suppressing the reduced but persistent scourge of the oceanic slave-trade; and lastly, and most overwhelming of all, they had to join battle with the vast interests of the American slave-holders.

Little need be said here as to the first two of these heads. The abolition of formal slavery within nearly every portion of the British dominions was accomplished in five or six years without much difficulty. Its abolition in the colonial possessions of other Powers involved, it is true, much correspondence and many deputations, but is of no special interest for the purpose of this biography. Most of this chapter will be occupied with activities directed towards the defeat of United States slavery. But before we pass on to this great issue, the question of the Atlantic slave trade is worthy of some consideration, as it involved a point of principle which was fundamental with Joseph Sturge. It was the policy of the British Government, for long after the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807, to employ armed cruisers in pursuing and seizing ships that attempted to export negroes from the West Coast of Africa for the American slave-markets. It was credibly reported that this practice resulted in the exportation of a greatly increased number of natives, of whom some two-thirds perished on the high seas. The enormous profits of the trade made the risks worth while, and the ship-captains used deliberately to throw overboard the incriminating negroes, when in danger of capture by a cruiser. Further the right of search claimed over foreign-owned vessels helped at least once

South Africa, which are endangered by the claims of those whose aim is to make the sub-continent a 'white man's country.' The Society has a great task awaiting it to safeguard native race interests at the close of the present war.



to bring Britain and America to the verge of war. The question was still a living one in 1850, when we find Cobden writing to Sturge agreeing that the employment of these cruisers had directly aggravated the evil, while it had hardened the hearts of the Brazilians, Cubans, Portuguese, and Spanish, whose vessels were searched and seized, preventing their consciences being stirred and checking the growth of the Anti-slavery movement in those countries. Even the Roman Catholic Church, Cobden wrote, has a conscience, to which appeal might be made, as it was to that of the Society of Friends. The method of armed force he described as belonging more properly to the devil than to One who is the author of peace and the lover of concord. 'Is it even too late to cast away the sword and try the New Testament?'

These sentiments of Cobden expressed exactly the feelings of his friend, and, at the foundation of the new Society, he fought a hard struggle with the advocates of the cruisers in order to introduce into its constitution the peace principle contained in the words 'moral, religious, and pacific methods only.' Writing to an American correspondent, he says that this 'is a *sine qua non* with Friends here.' And in another early letter he almost prophetically urges that whether the general emancipation of American slaves is effected peaceably or through a dreadful war depends greatly upon whether the cause is advocated on 'sound and just,' *i.e.* on 'pacific' principles. The first years of the new Society were clouded by another painful difference of opinion with the good Sir Thomas Buxton, who promoted an armed commercial expedition to civilise the native and impede the slave trade in West Africa. The ending of his scheme in disastrous failure doubtless confirmed the 'pacific' abolitionists in their attitude.

It was decided to open the international campaign in 1840 by holding a 'World's Convention' in London. International congresses were almost unknown at that date, and this accounts in large part for the tremendous enthusiasm which characterised the preparation for it and



its actual sessions. Sturge worked incessantly, moving from town to town in the Midlands and the North, rallying and organising the friends of freedom for the great demonstration. So in June the Convention was duly opened, in the presence of over five hundred delegates, including very important deputations from the United States and from France.

‘ Yes, let them gather! Summon forth  
The pledged philanthropy of Earth—  
From every land whose hills have heard  
The bugle blast of Freedom waking.’<sup>1</sup>

So Whittier sang in a spirited ode written for the occasion, and the event seemed to justify the poet’s hopes. The opening scene of the Congress, when the honoured Anti-slavery pioneer, Thomas Clarkson, came in leaning on Sturge for support to give the gathering his blessing, is said to have been of a most solemn and thrilling kind. Its pictorial representation may still be seen in the great hall of the Royal Courts of Justice. The painter Haydon, who says that he had never before attended ‘ benevolent meetings,’ thus describes the moment when the whole assembly answered the prayer of the aged Clarkson with their twice-repeated ‘ AMEN!’

‘ That deep-toned AMEN,’ he writes, ‘ came on my mind like the knell of a departing curse; I looked about me on the simple and extraordinary people, ever ready with their purse and their person for the accomplishment of their great object; and, if ever sound was an echo to the sense, or if ever deep and undaunted meaning was conveyed to the depths of the soul by sound alone, the death-warrant of slavery all over the earth was boded by that AMEN!’

One interesting characteristic of the meetings, which has since been adopted with good results as the practice of many bodies where Quakers have been united with others, was the pause of a few minutes spent in silent prayer or meditation before opening the proceedings. It seems to have been Joseph Sturge who was mainly instrumental in introducing this plan both here and on other occasions.

<sup>1</sup> Whittier: *The World’s Convention*.

But perhaps the most interesting feature of the Convention to many readers of this book was one which was so distressing at the time to its originators, that they were glad afterwards to pass it over in silence. We learn, however, from American sources that the delegates from the Massachusetts and Pennsylvania Societies included a number of women. At that time it was not usually considered becoming for women to sit on Committees with men, and the controversy on this subject had already proved sadly destructive to the unity of American abolitionism. The London Committee of the Convention met, and decided to exclude the women delegates from participation. (This may have been in good part due to the fact that the most prominent woman, Lucretia Mott, was a so-called Hicksite (or unorthodox) Friend, who went so far as to preach, while in London, in a Unitarian Chapel.) The question was reopened by the male 'Women's Rights' delegates in the Convention, who protested against starting a crusade for freedom by 'depriving half the world of their liberty.' After a three hours' debate the exclusion of women was upheld by a large majority. The women, after holding a meeting of protest, retired to a humble position in the gallery among the spectators. And Lloyd Garrison, the most noteworthy of the American delegates, felt so strongly about the matter that he retired with the women. Lucretia Mott in telling the story of the exclusion acknowledges the courtesy that she received from Joseph Sturge, but says that all reasoning was lost upon him, as he was prejudiced against the rights of women. This is in substantial harmony with the account that he himself gives of his attitude to the question during his subsequent American visit. In spite of the very exceptional liberty of action accorded to women within his own religious society, we have no evidence that he was sufficiently enlightened to support the enfranchisement of the other sex; though he welcomed with masculine inconsistency the *quiet* support of women during his Anti-slavery campaigns and at the Chartist election in Nottingham! Indeed before the sixties



this reform was regarded by almost every one, except by a section of the Chartists, as an absurdity. In America, however, partly as a result of the feeling stirred up by the rebuff at the London Convention, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Stanton took the lead in summoning, in 1848, the first 'Women's Rights Convention,' which was the beginning of the Woman Suffrage movement on the New Continent.

It was decided to follow up the Congress of 1840 by a series of missions to various governments and peoples, who were still involved in the sin of slavery. In this scheme Sturge was anxious, in spite of the pressing claims of English affairs, to play his part. At first he contemplated visiting Cuba and other slave-holding islands; later on Brazil seemed a desirable scene for the collection of facts and missionary enterprise; finally he fixed on the United States, as being the stronghold of the system and because of the presence there of large numbers of his own religious society. The most prominent among the few Quakers who were zealous in the abolition cause was John Greenleaf Whittier, the rising poet of freedom and peace. To him accordingly Sturge wrote, opening his mind to him 'as to a very old and intimate friend.' He gives three main reasons for his intended visit; first, the promotion of entire unity of action and co-operation between the British and American Anti-slavery Societies; secondly, to assist in removing the objections of American Friends to taking part in Anti-slavery propaganda; and lastly, the development of a proposal to hold 'a conference of nations for the promotion of permanent and universal peace.' The letter to Whittier is ended by a courteous request that the poet, should his health permit of it, would do him the kindness to be his companion during some of his visits.

It is impossible here to deal at all adequately with the huge and complicated issues of the struggles which ended in the abolition of American slavery by the disastrous methods of a civil war. But we must endeavour to sketch in a few lines the situation into which our traveller plunged



for four crowded months. In America, as in England, it was the Society of Friends who were the first to realise the sinfulness of the slave-holding practice. As early as 1688 a Meeting of German Quaker immigrants were the first to draw up a memorial against the buying and keeping of negroes. Later on the exertions of Anthony Benezet and of the Christ-like John Woolman were the chief outward means of clearing the whole Society from all complicity in slave-trading and slave-holding. This result was accomplished by 1784, eight years after the American Constitution had been framed on the principle that all men were created equal. At this time the slave system seemed on the decline, chiefly for economic reasons. But, about the beginning of the next century, the acquisition of tropical Louisiana and the invention of the cotton-gin entirely altered the trend of events. The cotton industry began to grow up on a huge scale throughout the Southern States of the Union, and the planters and capitalists persuaded themselves that slave labour was necessary to the maintenance of production. As usual, a system reared upon selfishness and greed was justified in the name of morality and religion, and the professing Churches of the South were almost unanimous in choosing Mammon for their god. The infection spread northwards, into States not adapted for negro labour, and during the thirties and forties there were large sections of New England, New York, and Pennsylvania, in which pro-slavery feeling was dominant, while Washington, the capital of the Republic, was a centre of the traffic in human flesh.

Meanwhile the conscience of many individuals was being roused, and from about 1831, when Lloyd Garrison began to preach 'immediate' rather than gradual emancipation, a strong abolitionist movement got under way. It was countered by a malignant outburst of pro-slavery violence. The lives of the advocates of freedom were often endangered, their meetings were broken up, their houses attacked. In 1834 the President of the new Anti-slavery Society, Lewis Tappan, (afterwards Sturge's intimate friend and corre-

spondent), had his house sacked in New York. Four years later the headquarters of the movement at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Hall, was burnt down amid the rejoicings of a huge mob. In the Slave States the preaching of emancipation was made, like the preaching of peace in nations waging war, a serious criminal offence.

One would have hoped that the fire of persecution would have led the abolitionists to close their ranks and unite, under the banner of the Christian principle, to face the powers of evil. Unhappily this was far from being the case. About three years before Sturge's visit they began to spend much of their strength in disputes about matters that were indeed of importance, but on which, in view of the paramount need of unity, they should have agreed to differ. Such were the observance of Sunday, the desirability of the Christian using his political privileges, and most of all, what we have already mentioned, the membership of women in the men's societies. These controversial questions split the movement from top to bottom, and the Anti-slavery cause was to a large extent paralysed.

The Society of Friends in America, in spite of its numerous and unhappy divisions, has always exceeded, both in numbers and influence, the sister body in this kingdom. Notwithstanding the recent triumph of justice and mercy within its own borders, a decline of moral earnestness had set in since the days of Woolman, and the quietist dread of 'popular excitement' and 'creaturely activity' made the Society as a whole at the best a negligible factor in the Anti-slavery movement. So anxious were these devout Quakers to keep themselves 'unspotted from the world,' so fearful were they of association with the unconverted majority, that the few enthusiasts who joined the Anti-slavery movement received nothing but coldness and official reprimands. This is the testimony of Whittier on the matter, contained in a letter written to Sturge some time after his visit. (The reference is to the important 'New England' Yearly Meeting, or Branch, of the Society.)



'Most of us belong to the younger class of members, and we have felt it a hard thing to stand up against the weight and influence of ministers and elders. When the decision was taken in our Yearly Meeting, shutting up our Meeting-houses against the friends of the slave, three or four of us who felt constrained to stand up and dissent from the body, were subjected to the charge of insubordination, and considered "out of the unity." For myself, I may as well admit to thee, knowing as thou dost the state of things among us, that I do not look to our Society for any official action, in its Society capacity, against slavery. If, within the last ten years, anything has been done for the cause of freedom in this country, our Society cannot claim any credit for it.'

Enough has been said to indicate how formidable a task was before Joseph Sturge, if he aspired, as he did from the bottom of his heart, to rouse the apathy and heal the divisions of his brethren across the Atlantic. He was away from England between March and August, 1841. His journal of impressions, with a number of interesting appendices, was published soon afterwards under the title of *A Visit to the United States in 1841*. It has a special interest, as it is the only literary monument of any extent which he has left behind. It is still readable, betraying a remarkable gift of observation and a wide interest in very various departments of human activity and benevolence. Moreover he does not suppress his own opinions and actions to the extent that was usually characteristic of his self-neglecting pen. We read for instance of his meeting, on the deck of a river steamboat, a fugitive negro couple, whom he assists on their flight to liberty in Canada. He goes to tea with coloured people in their own homes. He visits slave-dealers in their dens, and inspects prisons used as reception-houses for slaves coming under the hammer. We find some appreciative pages on John Woolman, whose home he visited. In Philadelphia he comes to the conclusion that he appears to be in 'the metropolis of the prejudice against colour, and that there is no city in the known world, where dislike amounting to hatred of the coloured population prevails more than in the city of "brotherly



love.''' At Washington, where Whittier said that 'his want of caution might have involved him in some difficulty, had they remained long,' he failed to receive any answer to his appeal to the pro-slavery President; but he satisfied his conscience and spread light abroad by composing and having printed, before he left America, at least three impassioned manifestoes against slavery, which were circulated in newspapers as well as through the post. The pro-slavery *New York Herald* thought him a sufficient danger to speak of his 'sinister influence' and call on the Southern delegation to 'look after this Sturge.' Much of the volume is of course taken up with accounts of the various degrees of feeling and apathy among Friends and others on the slavery question; and we have indications of the difficulty of his task, in the face of both overt and unexpressed hostility to his advocacy of bolder action. But he had eyes and interests for much besides his main concern. He visits, with results that will be described later, Judge Jay, the pioneer of the arbitration movement. The inspection of a private museum of Chinese curios leads him to an impassioned denunciation of the Opium War then being waged against the civilised Chinese. He is taken over the famous new prisons at Auburn, Sing Sing, and Philadelphia, and, though he seems to be somewhat misled by the apparent quietness and good order of the repressive 'silent association system' at the two former institutions, he is sensible enough to see the cruel and unnecessary character of the solitary confinement methods of the Philadelphia Penitentiary, which was at that time serving as model for the English prison authorities. He enjoys Niagara, though he has only space to devote two lines to its description! On the other hand the possibilities and success of temperance hotels and 'prohibition' townships are discussed with enthusiasm and at some length. At Lowell, then one of the foremost manufacturing centres in the States, he goes over numerous mills and social institutions. In other towns he inspects woollen mills and railway engine factories. He speaks enthusiastically of the evidences

of popular education, good morality, and good housing conditions among the factory hands, far above the English standard. He makes this a text for a sermon on the advantages to Great Britain of the free importation of American food; and he appeals to the example of America to show that a democratic suffrage can work well in practice. The American system of unestablished religious equality also comes in for its share of warm praise.

Two incidents of the tour are worthy of a fuller mention. In the city of Baltimore Joseph Sturge visited a large newly equipped slave-dealing establishment, whence at times cargoes of perhaps a hundred slaves were shipped off to the cotton plantations of the South. What he saw there, and his conversation with the owner, naturally impressed him deeply; and shortly afterwards he wrote to this man the following letter, which seems to breathe the best spirit of faithful but kindly admonition of the sinner.

‘ TO HOPE H. SLAUGHTER,

‘ Slave Trader, Baltimore.

‘ Since thou courteously allowed me, in company with my friend J. G. Whittier, to visit thy slave establishment in the city of Baltimore some weeks since, I have often felt a desire to address a few lines to thee. I need not, perhaps, say that my feelings were painfully exercised in looking over thy buildings, fitted up with bolts and bars, for the reception of human beings for sale. A sense of the misery and suffering of the unfortunate slaves, who have been from time to time confined there—of their separation from home and kindred—and of the dreary prospect of a life of unrequited toil in the South and South-West—rested heavily upon me. I could there realise the true nature of the system of slavery. I was in a market-house for human flesh, where humanity is degraded to a level with the brute; and where children of our common Father in Heaven, for whom our blessed Redeemer offered up the atoning sacrifice of His blood, were bargained for and sold like beasts that perish. And when I regarded thee as the merchant in this dreadful traffic, and heard thee offer remarks, which might in some degree be considered as an apology for thy business, calling our attention to the cleanly state of the apartments, the wholesome provisions,



et cet.; and especially when I heard thee declare that thou hadst been educated by a pious mother—that thou wast never addicted to swearing or other immoralities—and that thy business was a legalised one—that thou didst nothing contrary to law—and that, while in thy possession, the poor creatures were treated kindly—that families were not separated, et cet.,—I was glad to perceive some evidence that the nature of thy employment had not extinguished the voice of conscience within thee. In thy sentiments and in the manner of their utterance, I thought I could see that truth had not left itself without a witness in thy breast, and that a sense of the wrongfulness of thy occupation still disturbed thee.

‘To thy remark that thy business was necessary to the system of slavery, and an essential part of it—and if slave-holding were to be justified at all, the slave-trade must be also—I certainly can offer no valid objection; for I have never been able to discover any moral difference between the planter of Virginia and the slave-dealer of Baltimore, Richmond, and Washington. Each has his part to act in the system, and each is necessary to the other. And if the matter were not in all its bearings painfully serious, it would be amusing to witness the absurd contempt with which the slave-owner of Maryland or Virginia professes to look upon the trader, whose purchase of his surplus slaves alone enables him to retain the residue in his possession; for it seems very evident that the only profitable part of the system in those States at the present time is the sale of the annual increase of the slaves.

‘In passing from thy premises, we looked in upon the *Triennial Convention of the Baptists of the United States*, then in session in the city of Baltimore, where I found slave-holding ministers of high rank in the church, urging successfully the exclusion from the Missionary Board of that Society of all those who, in principle and practice, were known to be decided abolitionists; and the results of their efforts satisfied me that the darkest picture of slavery is not to be found in the jail of the slave-trader, but rather in a convocation of professed ministers of the Gospel of Christ, expelling from the Board of a Society formed to enlighten the heathen of other nations all who consistently labour for the overthrow of a system which denies a knowledge of the Holy Scriptures to near three millions of heathen at home!

‘But allow me, in a spirit, as I trust, of Christian kindness, to entreat thee not to seek excuses for thy own course in the



evil conduct of others. Thou hast already reached the middle period of life—the future is uncertain. By thy hopes of peace here and hereafter, let me urge thee to abandon this occupation. It is not necessary to argue its intrinsic wickedness, for thou knowest it already. I would therefore beseech thee to listen to that voice which, I am persuaded, sometimes urges thee to “put away the evil of thy doings,” to “do justice and love mercy,” and thus cease to draw upon thyself the curse which fell upon those merchants of Tyre, who “traded in the persons of men.” That these warnings of conscience may not be longer neglected on thy part, is the sincere wish of one who, while he abhors thy *occupation*, feels nothing but kindness and good will towards *thyself*.

‘Thy friend, JOSEPH STURGE.’

‘NEW YORK, 6th month, 30th, 1841.’

Our last picture from America is happily of a very different nature. It represents the meeting of the evangelical Quaker with the great Unitarian minister to whom some reference has already been made in this book. William Ellery Channing died shortly afterwards, and Whittier seems to have been so impressed by the beauty of the interview (at which he was present) that he devoted to it a large portion of his memorial ode on Channing. The following verses are taken from the poem; it will be noticed that they anticipate the part Joseph Sturge was to play during the ensuing year in the struggle for the People’s Charter.

‘By Narragansett’s sunny bay,  
Beneath his green embowering wood,  
To me it seems but yesterday  
Since at his side I stood.

The slopes lay green with summer rains,  
The western wind blew fresh and free,  
And glimmered down the orchard lanes  
The white surf of the sea.

With us was one, who, calm and true,  
Life’s highest purpose understood;  
And, like his blessed Master, knew  
The joy of doing good.

Unlearned, unknown to lettered fame,  
 Yet on the lips of England's poor  
 And toiling millions dwelt his name,  
 With blessings evermore.

Unknown to power or place, yet where  
 The sun looks o'er the Carib sea,  
 It blended with the freeman's prayer  
 And song of jubilee.

He told of England's sin and wrong,  
 The ills her suffering children know,  
 The squalor of the city's throng,  
 The green field's want and woe.

O'er Channing's face the tenderness  
 Of sympathetic sorrow stole,  
 Like a still shadow, passionless,  
 The sorrow of the soul.

But when the generous Briton told  
 How hearts were answering to his own,  
 And Freedom's rising murmur rolled  
 Up to the dull-eared throne,

I saw, methought, a glad surprise  
 Thrill through that frail and pain-worn frame,  
 And kindling in those deep, calm eyes  
 A still and earnest flame.

No bars of sect or clime were felt,  
 The Babel strife of tongues had ceased,  
 And at one common altar knelt  
 The Quaker and the priest.

And not in vain: with strength renewed,  
 And zeal refreshed, and hope less dim  
 For that brief meeting, each pursued  
 The path allotted him.'

Whittier had met Sturge when he landed, had piloted him during a good portion of his travels, and was the last to bid him God-speed when he sailed for home. The two men

seem to have been very happy in each other's companionship; and the friendship thus begun continued till they were parted by death, though Whittier never visited England, as his friend often wished him to do. The impression made upon Whittier is described in the following words written long after:—

‘The great idea of duty seemed always with Joseph Sturge. He used to remind me often of that line of Milton’s which describes his habit of life and labour:

“As ever in the great Task-master’s eye.”

‘He made no parade of his devotional feeling and duties; he was free from everything like cant or affectation; but I have a most vivid recollection of seasons when the solemnity of silent prayer was upon his countenance as he sought, oftener than the morning, for strength and wisdom to do in the right way the work which he believed his Divine Master required at his hands.’

The poet also bore testimony to the good that Joseph Sturge’s visit had done, though it did not, alas, come in time to assist in the lighting up of a great religious crusade, which would have saved Anti-slavery from becoming the prey, as it afterwards did, of party strife culminating in war. He lays stress on the coldness and ill-disguised opposition, the unkindness and groundless suspicions manifested against Sturge, as he strove to ‘fan into life the all but expiring embers of abolition.’ But later on Whittier writes that Sturge’s labours and his published letter have done great good. ‘The iron is beginning to melt.’ Sturge himself was too humble to take any elated view of the result. Though, as he wrote to his sister, he had not for a moment doubted that he had been rightly guided to cross the Atlantic, the most he felt able to say on his return was that ‘he might hope some little good would result.’

The Anti-slavery labours of the remaining eighteen years of Sturge’s life were predominantly concerned with what was, for convenience, called the Free Labour Movement.



There were other preoccupations, it is true; for instance his constant correspondence, not especially on this topic, but by way of encouragement and advice, with prominent American abolitionists. There was the abortive Paris Anti-slavery Conference of 1842, the occasion of his first visit (in the thick of the Suffrage campaign) to the Continent, when the French Ministry put their ban on a movement which was crowned with success by the action of the revolutionary government of 1848. There was the protest which he and others felt bound to make against the step taken by the newly founded Evangelical Alliance in 1846, in admitting into unquestioned Christian fellowship those Churches which sanctioned slavery—an action which made Whittier sadly exclaim that ‘if your preachers and ministers in England and Scotland should take up their residence in the Slave States, nine in ten of them would in five years either become slave-holders or open defenders of slavery.’ And there was the excitement occasioned by the visit to England in 1853 of the gifted authoress of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Nevertheless the promotion of ‘Free Labour’ was perhaps the chief concern, after the cause of peace, of this closing period of Joseph Sturge’s activities.

The idea of this movement was two-fold; first, to persuade the public to refuse, from motives of either humanitarian principle or enlightened self-interest, or both mingled, the purchase of goods or raw materials produced by the labour of slaves; and at the same time to promote the supply and distribution of similar productions grown by the labour of free men. It seemed clear that, if the slave-holders thus found their most important markets closed to the sale of slave-grown produce, they would soon, on economic grounds, emancipate their slaves, even if they were not impressed by the moral considerations which had brought such a movement into existence. There were not many articles produced by slave labour, but they included very important ones, rice, coffee, tobacco, and above all sugar and cotton. In three distinct, but interdependent ways, did the friends of the negro seek to promote this

method of securing his world-wide freedom; by state control of imports, by the development of free-labour cultivation, and by the principle of voluntary personal abstention from slave produce. Each of these methods holds an important enough place in Sturge's life to justify a separate mention.

One of the original objects of the Anti-Slavery Society, as reconstituted in 1839, was 'to promote the adoption of fiscal regulations in favour of free labour.' The letters of Joseph Sturge, from this date up to 1846 and later, frequently refer to this question, which he regarded as most important. The great Convention of 1840 adopted the principle of advocating the exclusion of slave-grown produce by prohibitive import duties. These were the years when Cobden and Bright were fighting their campaign for a complete Free Trade system; and this question, as it affected sugar especially, became the subject of heated and prolonged controversy. Cobden and the Free Trade enthusiasts felt that their principle was of such primary importance that any divergences from it would do more harm than good; while they urged that abstention from slave produce was a matter for the conscience of the individual, and that Government should no more interfere on the subject by legislation than (say) as regards enforcing the observance of Sunday or the prohibition of alcoholic drinks. On the other hand Sturge and others, among whom O'Connell was the most prominent name, regarded slave-grown produce as stolen goods, procured at the expense of robbery of the worst description, if not, in some cases, of murder. And they maintained, that, even though it did not at the time appear possible to enforce consistent government prohibition against all such articles, yet this was no reason for not applying the principle, when it was quite a feasible one, *e.g.*, in the case of sugar, of which there was a supply available from the free plantations of the British West Indies; while a practically prohibitive duty upon foreign sugar (which was mainly slave-grown) was actually in existence, as part of the protectionist system. The con-



troversy on the sugar duties threatened to divide acutely the second international Anti-Slavery Convention, which was held in 1843, and it seems to have engrossed much attention during the following year. However in 1846 the new Liberal Government, in the teeth of a strange combination of protectionists and abolitionists, carried a bill for the lowering of the duty on foreign slave-grown sugar, down to the rate of the tax on the West Indian article, a measure which proved to be only a step in the extinction of the duty altogether. This change, bringing as it did a cheaper sugar within the means of the poorer classes, was the death-blow to the movement for state restrictions on slave-grown produce. We have already mentioned that Sturge felt so strongly on the subject, that the attitude taken up by Cobden was largely instrumental in detaching him from the Free Trade movement. In view of the circumstances of the day, when the tyranny of the landed and protectionist interest was using every tool to maintain the unjust taxes on the people's food, the Free Traders were probably right in their opposition to state interference in this particular matter. But the policy so dear to Joseph Sturge is a tenable one; indeed it might be urged that there is one, though apparently only one, justification on Christian grounds for a prohibitory tariff against foreign goods, that is, when those goods are produced under conditions of sweated or otherwise oppressed labour that fall far below both the humane standard and that maintained in the case of home industries. The real remedy, however, for this kind of evil is international labour legislation.

Some considerable time before this line of Anti-slavery action ceased to give any promise of success, Sturge began to devote himself to the more positive and stimulating, if also more arduous task of developing the supply and purchase of free-labour produce, a concern which occupied his attention from about 1844 to the closing weeks of his life. It was no new idea with him then, for, as far back as 1825, he wrote to a cousin of being able 'to give a death-blow to slavery itself, and that in a manner perfectly in



accordance with our pacific principles—I mean by the fair competition of free labour.’ At that time he was probably thinking particularly of sugar, the staple product of the West Indies; but, when his interest was transferred to the United States as the stronghold of slavery, he naturally thought and acted in terms of cotton, in the production of which a vast proportion of the American slaves were employed. And American cotton was grown primarily for the English market, for the mills of Lancashire and Yorkshire. In 1861 about eighty-five per cent. of the raw material used in Britain came from the States. It was abundantly clear, as was shown in a manifesto issued by Sturge and others in 1846, that ‘the demand for American cotton in Great Britain has been a chief means of perpetuating and extending slavery in America,’ and that the system would be overthrown if manufacturers and the public could be induced to relinquish the use of the slave-grown article. The planters would be most unlikely to risk the loss of the British market for any consideration which the continued existence of slavery might supply.

The first practical necessity was naturally to bring free-labour cotton into the country at a price which would give it some chance of ousting its tainted rival. We find Sturge taking the lead in an experiment of this kind, energetically during 1845-46 collecting a fund for the purposes of purchasing a stock. This done, manufacturers had to be induced to use it, and agents and retailers found to sell it. Such objects necessitated visits to many parts of the country, visits cheerfully paid by our veteran organiser. Free-labour cotton, though it could be secured in part from America, came chiefly from British India. Its drawbacks at this time were great, as it was more expensive and of inferior quality, causing difficulty in the manufacturing processes. Nevertheless the zeal of Sturge and others persevered for a long time against the callousness and short-sightedness of the British public. John Bright, himself a cotton-mill owner, took the matter up in 1847 and began to agitate for measures to increase the growth of cotton in

India. Before the Mutiny the government of India was in the hands of the East India Company, and Bright felt that the question of Indian reform and of cotton production were vitally interdependent. In 1853 we find him writing to Sturge as follows, with reference to the question of the government of India:—

‘ It seems to me that the slavery question is deeply involved in what is now to be done. An intelligent American from South Carolina, holding an official position, told me lately that the moment we could obtain cotton from any other country, that moment was the first great blow struck at American slavery. I fully believe that a wise and economical Government could so free the industry of that country (India), and so open its communications, that we might have cotton in great quantity from it, so as materially to affect our position with regard to the States.

‘ Could not the enemies of slavery in this country help us now? ’

Some time after this letter, during the painful months of the Crimean war, we do in fact find the two friends co-operating on this subject of Indian cotton. In one of numerous letters on Anti-slavery matters addressed to Mrs. Beecher Stowe, the authoress of *Uncle Tom*, Sturge mentions attending meetings in Lancashire, at one of which John Bright was present, for the ventilation of this topic; and, in another letter to Bright of the same period, he speaks of a second visit to the cotton county ‘ to talk over, with a few practical manufacturers, the best means of increasing the supply of free-labour cotton.’

But alas, though here and there interest was stirred, the appeal fell in general upon deaf ears. Disregarding the dictates of humanity, and heedless of the impending calamity in America, British trade preferred to go stolidly on, depending upon the slave-grown crops. The sacrifice involved in the alternative course was indeed too much to expect from men, whose consciences were seared by the demoralising occupation of carrying on industry, not chiefly for the good of the workers and the community,

but rather for the sake of extracting for themselves the largest margin of private profits. In 1861 came the four terrible years of the Civil War, with the consequent cessation of export from the Slave States. Lancashire was caught unprepared. The mills were closed, and unemployment and famine were everywhere prevalent. Millions must then have regretted that their masters had not followed such pleadings as those of Bright and Sturge, and taken steps years before to improve the Indian supply. Dire necessity now did, what enlightened humanity had failed to achieve; production by free labour in India, Egypt, and elsewhere was stimulated by British effort; but it was only towards the close of the long war that sufficient supplies were available to re-start a considerable proportion of the Lancashire cotton mills. It is a remarkable fact, however, that within the next decade the United States had again outdistanced all rivals in the supply of commercial cotton, thus proving that the slave system was in no degree indispensable for the cheap production of the article.<sup>1</sup>

It remains to describe a third method of attack against the enemy, which failed indeed like the other two, but was full of that kind of quiet heroism which is always fruitful. This was the principle of rigidly abstaining from the personal use of any article tainted with the sin of oppression. Back in the days when Clarkson and Wilberforce were campaigning against the slave trade, thousands of English households are said to have gone without sugar, because none but slave sugar was available. In Birmingham at a later date we hear of the Quakers making house-to-house visitations, begging the inmates to abstain from slave-grown produce. Whatever it failed to do, such self-sacrifice at any rate kept alive the memories and the zeal of those who practised the abstention. As might be expected, Joseph Sturge's household is said to have been one of the strictest in this respect. We are told indeed that nothing

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to notice to-day that the amount of cocoa produced by free labour is leaping forward every year by great increases, whilst the slave-grown product is rapidly decreasing.



was allowed in it which, as far as he knew, bore the taint of slavery. This does not, however, seem to have been true before about 1842; for we find Cobden in that year writing a humorous skit, depicting an interview with the Brazilian Ambassador, in which he describes Sturge as protesting against slave-grown sugar, while wearing a hat and coat lined with slave-grown cotton. Perhaps this was the beginning of his abstention from cotton as well. At any rate afterwards, in the absence of really satisfactory Indian cotton, linen underwear is said to have been used by every one in the Sturge household, even the sewing thread being linen. The cynic may laugh at such conscientiousness; but, no amount of failure could destroy its spiritual potency to influence the world for good, provided it was, as we believe it to have been, no empty form, but really a sacrament, that is to say the outward sign of an inward grace—the love of our fellow-men.<sup>1</sup>

It is often claimed that American emancipation could not, in view of the obstinate wickedness of the Southern whites, have been secured without the civil war, in the

<sup>1</sup> The possibility of success in a high-principled commercial boycott of this kind is shown by the following example of our own day. In many of the States of the American Union the conditions of labour and wages allowed by law are most unsatisfactory, and, what is worse, the State labour laws themselves are often flagrantly violated. Since 1891, a 'National Consumers' League' with many branches has been organised to promote improvement in labour conditions. The members of the League undertake, as far as practicable, to make their purchases from those firms whose names have been admitted to a 'White List.' In this way 'sweated' goods are in effect boycotted; for the Consumers' League 'White List' label certifies that the articles bearing it are made under clean and wholesome conditions, in factories where the State laws are obeyed, overtime is not worked, children under sixteen are not employed, and no 'home-work' is given out. It is claimed that by this method of what we may call inverted boycott, a large measure of success has been obtained in improving the conditions of the workers in American stores and factories.

In another part of the world there is abundant evidence to show that the 'cocoa boycott' of certain English manufacturing firms has been one of the principal factors in securing the liberation of some twelve thousand contract slaves from the Portuguese cocoa plantations in West Africa.

midst of which the slaves were freed. This is a dogmatic assertion, and one which implies a disbelief in the possibilities of that faith, which, as Jesus said, can remove mountains, and of that meekness to which the same Prophet promised the inheritance of the earth. In this case, as in most others, the true Christian method of overcoming evil with the spirit of intense, aggressive love was never tried, except by a tiny handful of persons. In Britain, the manufacturers and the public, ready enough to be sentimental over the pathos of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, were, with but few exceptions, unwilling to take the *one* effective way of protesting against the abomination that was possible at such a distance from it—that is refusing to purchase American cotton. To enlightened American Christians there were more potent methods open; but how few employed them in the right spirit! Earlier in this chapter we have sought to indicate how an inert quietism, and an unworthy fear of soiling their hands with the defilement of the world, kept the Society of Friends in America, as it did other groups of pious Americans, from waging a moral crusade against the slave system; and, how, among those who did come forward as abolitionists, the spirit of party strife led to fatal disunion and to the wasting of strength upon secondary matters of opinion. The result was that the moral and pacific nature of the agitation became more and more obscured by less ideal sentiments. Christian motives ceased to predominate, constitutional methods and moral persuasion were despaired of. At length the Republican party took up the cudgels against the Southern slaveholders with all the loud aggressiveness that is characteristic of party warfare; and, as both sides had command of weapons of coercion, civil war was the inevitable outcome.<sup>1</sup> But we can imagine a very different course of events. Had there been a hundred Joseph Sturges among the Quakers of America, had there been another hundred

<sup>1</sup> 'Close your ears to John Woolman one century, and you will get John Brown the next, with Grant to follow.' G. M. Trevelyan, *Essays* (1913).

such men among the manufacturers of Britain; if the Churches of New England and Pennsylvania had united in a fervent moral and pacific crusade to preach the sin of slavery, if they had permeated, in the teeth of every form of persecution, the ranks of their brethren in the South, in the kind of way that the early Christians permeated society through the length and breadth of the Roman Empire, if their missionary efforts had been backed up by the moral and economic protest of Christian England—in such circumstances it is surely reasonable to suppose that slavery would have been voluntarily abandoned by the educated opinion of the Southern States, without the immense calamity of the war, and without the legacy of racial antagonism and other forms of evil, which still afflict the regions where the negro was once a slave.



## CHAPTER VIII

## A PIONEER OF PEACE

To the average Englishman the name 'Quaker' probably designates, if it means anything at all, a devout type of Christian, who is for 'peace at any price,' and at any rate professes his intention to have nothing to do with fighting, even in self-defence. This description, while, of course, a very partial one, has probably been true of the larger portion of the Society of Friends, throughout the two hundred and fifty years of its existence. There is a popular idea that pacifism (unless it happens to be a mere cloak for rebellion or disloyalty) is not to be distinguished from what might be termed 'passivism,' the disease of inert and timid minds. If many Friends, and more especially those of a century ago, have laid themselves open to such a charge, Joseph Sturge emphatically did not, as the earlier chapters of this book sufficiently prove. So too, when we are to describe his attitude to the demons of war and national aggressiveness, we shall see how valiant a fighter he was, albeit not with outward weapons.

It was only during the last fifteen or twenty years of his life that Sturge became an actor in the newly organised movement for promoting international peace. But he was one of those men, whose days, in the words of the poet, are 'bound each to each by natural piety,' and we possess records of incidents which indicate how more than usually consistent his life was in this sphere, as in most others also.

The first of these dates from his nineteenth year, during the last period of the war with Napoleon. At that time the law required that a Quaker, who was drawn for compulsory service in the Militia, must either provide a substitute by

paying a fine of from £10 to £30 (according to his income) or, in default of such payment, suffer distraint of goods to an equal amount. Joseph was one of those so drawn, and he had the moral backbone to refuse to acquiesce in the conscription of another man in his place. As a result, a number of his sheep, (it was during his first experiment in farming), were seized by the authorities. Years afterwards he referred to this incident upon a political platform, saying that, but for his ownership of the sheep, he 'should have gone to prison, as a testimony against any appeal to arms; for he would sooner lose his life than take one.'

This incident probably brought home to him, as much as anything else—for the English farmers of those days were hardly at all affected by the war—his responsibility as a Christian citizen for the deeds of violence and bloodshed habitually done in the name of King and country during the course of international strife. At any rate, four or five years later, in 1818, he was, as we have previously recorded, the chief means of founding, at Worcester, a branch of the London Peace Society. After his removal to Birmingham, he helped to start, in that city, another branch of the same organisation. From this time, no doubt, he was labouring continuously in humble ways, amid the excitements of the Anti-slavery movement and of Birmingham local politics, to promote the peace spirit amongst his fellows. But there is a long gap before we have anything to record. Then, in the year 1838-9, in connection with the revival of the Anti-slavery Society, we find the peace principle coming to the front again. It is sufficient here to recall what has been said in an earlier chapter of the profound importance which Sturge attached to the establishment of the new Society on a basis which only permitted the use of means 'of a moral, religious, and pacific character,'—a point of immediate importance, in view of the policy of employing armed cruisers to suppress the slave-trade.<sup>1</sup>

But more searching tests of his principles were at hand.

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 91-2.

We have illustrated, in our account of the disturbances at Birmingham in 1839, the degree to which he earned the blessing promised to the peacemakers by the fearless way in which, during the riots and afterwards, he on the one hand attempted to persuade the populace to refrain from violence, and on the other hand protested against the display and use of armed force by the authorities. A large part of his objection to the introduction of government police into the town was due to their being armed, as we have mentioned, with sabres or cutlasses. The specific protests which he made against this arming of the police (apart from its unconstitutional character) illustrate well his attitude to the use of physical force. At a meeting of the Town Council, held very shortly after the incendiary riot, Alderman Sturge is recorded as moving a resolution of objection to an armed police force, which was carried unanimously. Among other things he said:—‘He objected on principle to standing armies, as well as to armed police. To arm them was bad policy also. It was more dangerous to try and govern the people by force than as rational beings. He had no objection himself to go out as a special constable, if unarmed; nor did he object to constables’ staffs. He wished it to be publicly known that he, as an individual, could not defend any property by the loss of life; although he was to be cast on the world penniless, he could not take the life, even of an incendiary. He would be better satisfied to lose all he had, rather than that it should be saved at the sacrifice of human life.’

Three months later, in the course of his speech <sup>1</sup> at the crowded meeting gathered in the Town Hall to protest against the continued control of imported police by the Government, he clearly asserted his belief that ‘the taking away of human life, under any possible circumstances, is forbidden by Christianity,’ adding that ‘to hold this sentiment is a far greater protection than to trust to armed police.’

This was on November 25th. On November 28th he

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 63-4.



appeared in the local police court under the following remarkable circumstances. Some days previously he had made his way into the midst of a large crowd, who were watching a prize fight in Edgbaston Fields, with the intention of getting into the ring and dissuading the combatants from fighting. But in the crowd he was hemmed in by pickpockets, his coat was torn and his watch stolen. There was no personal violence offered, indeed he was guarded away by some of the parties. He afterwards declared that 'if he had lost ten watches and had had ten coats stolen, he would have thought the loss very little, if he could only have stopped such a cruel conflict and shown the poor men engaged in it the folly and wickedness of their conduct.' As it happened, a young man was in some way arrested subsequently with Joseph Sturge's watch upon him. This person was confronted with the owner of the watch in the police court. How astonished he must have been to hear the Quaker solemnly announce that he could take no part in the prosecution: for he could not conscientiously accept for the protection of his person or his property the aid of government police who used weapons calculated to take human life. The subsequent fate of the poor thief is unknown to us, but we can have little doubt that Sturge did his best to get him off as lightly as possible.

Five years later, in 1844, we hear of a meeting of the Town Council, who had by that time recovered the control of the police, at which a letter from Joseph Sturge, on the subject of their armed character, was read. In it he reminds them of their resolution of 1839 against the police carrying any mortal weapon, and explains that, so long as the government armed police were quartered on the town, he refused to pay his poor-rate, on the ground that much of it went to the support of such police. When local control was re-established, he naturally supposed the arms would be discontinued; but 'I am sorry to say' he wrote 'I have since seen one of the police in my own garden with a sabre.' He points out that any armed policeman, when he thinks

a case occurs sufficient to justify it, may suddenly use his sabre, however incompetent he may be to form a correct opinion, and he asks the Town Council to carry their resolution of 1839 into effect.<sup>1</sup>

We do not know how far the Quaker Chartist realised the complete reconstruction of society on juster principles that will be needed before we can expect an only partially Christianised community to abolish the background of deadly weapons with which the law is now in the last resort enforced; but we can heartily agree with the wisdom which objected to a display of force, as tending to keep alive in the community the pernicious idea, that social morality is only, or chiefly, dependent upon the existence of organised violence ready to coerce the offender.

We shall presently describe the outcome of the principles that we have just been illustrating, when applied by their possessor to the movement for international peace. Before doing so, however, we must briefly consider the circumstances with which that movement had to deal in the years under review. The Battle of Waterloo closed a long epoch of almost continuous wars, in which England was constantly intervening in the conflicts of Europe, so as to maintain or restore a 'balance of power' between the opposing governments, and was, at the same time, profiting from the continental wars by extending, at the cost of other nations, the frontiers of her colonial Empire. Waterloo was followed by an unprecedented period of so-called peace, which lasted for nearly forty years (1815-1854), up to the war with Russia. It is true that, during the first decade or so after Waterloo, the reaction of exhaustion and the urgency of domestic needs made peace an object of desire among almost all sections of the nation. But the hard fact remains that through the greater part of these forty years a government was tolerated, which was habitually waging wars ending in the annexation of

<sup>1</sup> It appears, however, from the Corporation records, that as late as 1879 the Birmingham police carried cutlasses in the 'dangerous' parts of the town.



territory outside Europe, and was continually practising intervention, backed by the threat of war, in the affairs of other civilised powers. This latter characteristic was well described by Washington Irving in his famous contemporary description of John Bull. 'He cannot hear of a quarrel between the most distant of his neighbours, but he begins incontinently to fumble with the head of his *cudgel*, and consider whether his interest or honour does not require that he shall meddle in their broils.' The policy of foreign aggression was more especially marked during the years 1830-1841 and also from 1846 onwards, when the conduct of our foreign affairs was chiefly in the hands of Lord Palmerston, a man truly representative of the domineering and fighting temper that builds up huge empires. The government of Sir Robert Peel, in the forties, undoubtedly favoured a pacific foreign policy; but, even during these five years, the Palmerstonian régime had so infected popular opinion that the country was brought three times to the verge of war; once with the United States, over a frontier question on the Pacific; and twice with France, over the wrongs of an imprudent missionary, and again as to supposed French designs upon Morocco. So lightly do politicians regard the moral evil of war and the disasters it inevitably causes to thousands of unwilling participants!

In October, 1850, Cobden had occasion to write to Sturge, deprecating the idea, which Sturge then entertained, of approaching Palmerston at the Foreign Office, with a view to the British Government suggesting arbitration between the warring peoples of Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein. This letter, in spite of one or two things that might be said in qualification, appears to sum up, with but little exaggeration, the facts, which are recorded in our history books, while it expresses the hope of better things in the future.

'If you look back at our career for the last quarter of a century, you will find that *we* have been incomparably the most sanguinary nation on earth. Look at our career in China, in Burma, in India, New Zealand, the Cape, Syria, Spain,



Portugal, Greece, etc., there is hardly a country, however remote, in which we have not been waging war, or dictating our terms at the point of the bayonet. Compare our career with that of any other European State, and you will find that we have been by far the greatest blood-shedders of all. I doubt whether the whole of the Continental States have been engaged in so many hostilities as ourselves. Then, if you bear in mind that we occupy forty or fifty places in all parts of the globe, almost all of them by the right of the strong arm of conquest, and some of them, as Gibraltar for instance, a standing insult to a great nation; if you bear all these things in mind, and that we have the most haughty and aggressive Foreign Minister now in office that has presided in Downing Street in our time, and that he is decidedly *popular*; then I think you will agree with me that we ought to be careful how we attempt to make our Government pretend to be the propagandists of peace and arbitration abroad, before we have succeeded in so changing public opinion at home as to present a more pacific and conciliatory face to foreign countries. The fault of our arrogant, aggressive, and conquering policy lies at the door of the *people* of this country quite as much as of the aristocracy. We are a race which carries out everything in which it engages with unrivalled energy. We carried on for upwards of a century as large a traffic in negroes as all the rest of the world. The same may be said, I fear, of our warlike achievements. Our national debt surpasses in amount all the public debts of the world, and almost every farthing of it is the price of blood. Whilst I say this, I am by no means inclined to despair of seeing the British people make the same amends in the case of its warlike propensities, that it did in the case of the slave trade. On the contrary, I hope that, as a nation, we shall be the leaders in the *peace reformation*. But in order to realise this, we must direct our attention to the necessity of a change of policy at home.'

It is now time to record some of the ways in which Joseph Sturge and his friends had already, during the ten years preceding this letter, been attempting, not without some success, to influence public opinion in the direction of the change of foreign policy, on which Cobden lays so much stress.

Perhaps the worst of our Asiatic wars, and one now

almost universally admitted to have left a stain upon our history, was that which was prosecuted for some two years, from the spring of 1840, against the Chinese, for the miserable purposes of forcing the purchase of opium upon a government that wished to preserve its subjects from that deadly drug.<sup>1</sup> It was the shame of this occasion which first brought Sturge into the open as an opponent of war. He assisted in organising meetings of protest, both at London and Birmingham, and caused to be printed and circulated an address, over his signature, 'To the Christian Public of Great Britain.' The spirit of this leaflet may be gathered from the following paragraph:—

'A wholesale carnage, which it is frightful to contemplate, has already begun; and surely the disciples of the Prince of Peace cannot be held guiltless, if they are silent on this occasion. Is it not the duty of every one, of whatever religious denomination, solemnly to protest against such a war as this, although not prepared with me to condemn all war as forbidden under the Christian dispensation? and if our legislators treat their remonstrances with contempt or indifference, the people of China may hereafter learn that it was not the disciples of Him whose doctrines the missionaries have preached who were engaged in their destruction, but a party in power who, though *professing* the name, *possessed* not the spirit of Christianity.'

For many years before the Opium War of 1840 a small but devoted band of Englishmen had been labouring to bring the Christian public of the country to a sense of the incompatibility of war with the teachings of their religion. After an unsuccessful attempt in the year preceding the Battle of Waterloo, the London Peace Society was founded in 1816 by a committee of earnest Evangelicals and Quakers, of whom the best known were Thomas Clarkson and William Allen. The basis of this 'Society for the Promotion of Permanent and Universal Peace' was the proposition that 'all war, whether offensive or defensive, is, upon Christian

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps some day we shall offer to cede back to China the island of Hong Kong, which was one of the spoils of this war.

principles, utterly indefensible.' A Society that in its propaganda remained true, as this one did, to the Sermon on the Mount precepts of loving enemies, and not resisting evil with violence, could hardly be expected to make rapid headway against the spirit of the world and of the professing Churches. Nevertheless its members showed such fervour and enterprise that, by means of tracts, lectures, sermons, and occasional articles in the newspapers, auxiliary societies or branches were formed, during the first twenty years of its existence, in most of the larger and many of the smaller towns of Great Britain. There was, from the first, an encouraging correspondence with the numerous peace societies that were springing up in the United States. In Continental Europe there were very few co-operating agencies to be found, but the ' Société de la Morale Chrétienne ' in Paris, founded in 1821, was in part a peace association, and the Geneva Peace Society was established in 1830. The tracts of the London Society were translated into the chief continental languages, and circulated widely through the post and by the efforts of their Foreign Secretary.

We honour the perseverance and the zeal of these pioneers of Peace. The work of education which they initiated bore its fruit in the developments of later years. But we cannot help feeling that their methods were inadequate; that they placed, for example, after the fashion of their day, far too much reliance upon the efficacy of the unsupported tract, of which documents hundreds of thousands were issued from their press. And they had not realised how large a measure of *communistic* spirit and practice is involved in the sincere advocacy of non-resistance principles; they did not see that such principles cannot be preached with any real consistency or any large fruitfulness by persons who are enjoying and acquiescing in conditions of economic comfort that are dependent, more or less directly, upon the enforced exploitation of multitudes of their fellow-creatures.

Though they probably overlooked fundamental con-



siderations of this kind, the Committee of the Peace Society were well aware of the small measure of success that all their diverse labours had been able to secure. In their Report for the year 1834, for instance, they speak of their Society, in comparison with the 'popular' Anti-slavery Society, as making but 'little display among the numerous institutions of a salutary nature which distinguish the present age of the world.' One reason, indeed, for the small amount of attention paid to their efforts was probably the fact that the Anti-slavery movement engrossed up to 1834, if not up to 1838, the energies of the larger portion of the philanthropic Evangelicals. After West Indian emancipation had been finally secured in 1838, some, at any rate, of the zeal that had been directed towards the cause of the negro was released for the benefit of the peace principle. The next few years were, as it happened, signalised by wars with Afghanistan, Scinde, and China, of which the injustice and unnecessary character were so marked as to stir the indignation of many thoughtful men. There was also in 1841 a serious dispute with the United States over a boundary question, which might have led to war between the two great nations. These and other circumstances induced men like Sturge to bring the peace question for the first time into the region of vigorous popular propaganda; and a movement was organised, which in the course of a few years attracted at any rate the interest—friendly or hostile—of the general public and the press in Great Britain, America, and many parts of Europe.

The success of the World Anti-slavery Convention of 1840 suggested the idea of a similar international gathering of the friends of peace. When Sturge was in America in the year following, he had at Boston laid such a proposal before the American Peace Society. The scheme was taken up, and in 1843 the first General Peace Convention was held in London; the only foreign countries, however, which were properly represented were France and America. Sturge was a vice-president. The atmosphere was very distinctly Christian and pacifist. The sittings were opened

each day, very possibly at Sturge's suggestion, with 'silent prayer to the Heavenly Father.' And among the resolutions passed were two, of which the effect was to urge Christians, neither to allow their children to be trained for the war services, nor themselves to engage in the manufacture of arms and ammunition. These downright assertions of the unchristian nature of even defensive warfare were characteristic of the movement throughout the forties; and it is very remarkable how they could be enunciated boldly at crowded public meetings without encountering opposition. In 1845 the militarist politicians and newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic were clamouring for war over another frontier dispute. The Peace Society stalwarts brought their forces into action. We read of a great and enthusiastic 'town's meeting' in the Birmingham Town Hall which included among its protests one 'against standing armies and navies.' Sturge was in the chair. In his speech he spoke out in strong denunciation of the Asiatic wars and of the whole war system, begging his working friends never to enlist, and adding his opinion that 'the disciples of Christ ought not to be employed in making muskets and swords.' This was a strong sentiment in the town which could at that time be described as the 'arsenal of England.' Yet, at a big London meeting three years later, Sturge claimed his own city as having the strongest feeling against war of any place in the kingdom. Between 1845 and 1848 it certainly appears that as many as five or six thousand citizens of Birmingham could be gathered without difficulty to support pacifist resolutions of the most uncompromising kind. The events of a few years later indicate that the feeling of these years was but a wave of emotion, not grounded on any rock of principle. But at any rate the public sentiment of the time was organised to such good purpose, that the danger of war, first with America and then with France, was averted. And both in 1846 and in 1848 the government proposals for great increases in the expenditure on armaments and on the militia had to be abandoned because of the popular



feeling. In all this agitation Sturge was one of the foremost, attending meetings and corresponding with many friends on both sides of the Atlantic. We even find him discussing with Douglas Jerrold that witty writer's pacifist contributions to *Punch*.

Three remarkable personalities, with whom Sturge was in very intimate touch, took from about this time such a leading part in the movement that they merit separate mention here.

The first of these is Joseph Sturge's biographer, Henry Richard, afterwards Radical M.P. for Merthyr Tydvil, and known in his own country of Wales as the 'Apostle of Peace.' He was appointed Secretary of the Peace Society in the red-letter year 1848, and held the position continuously for over thirty-six years. At one time the minister of a Congregational Church, he soon found a wider vocation. He possessed a statesmanlike grasp of affairs and a genial sense of humour; and the early efforts of the international movement owe much to his industry and zeal. He was in very close contact with Sturge during the last ten or eleven years of his life, and evidently revered and loved him dearly. The two men were remarkably congenial to one another, and held the same variety of pacifist faith. Cobden paid a high tribute to Richard's Christianity, when he wrote to Sturge (in 1857), 'He is one of the few men of his cloth I have known, who understands the difference between the old and the new dispensations.'

Elihu Burritt, by the intensity of his religious enthusiasm for peace, seems to have contributed more motive energy to the movement between 1846 and 1850 than did any other single individual. A native of Connecticut, U.S.A., he had become known as the 'learned blacksmith,' because, while working at the forge, he made himself more or less acquainted with all the languages of Europe. He became entirely engrossed in the peace movement as a result of the efforts made by its friends on both sides of the Atlantic during the Anglo-American war crisis of 1846.



During the next three years he made England his headquarters, and from the outset of his visit he received whole-hearted assistance from Joseph Sturge. The chief of his various methods of peace propaganda was the 'League of Universal Brotherhood,' an organisation for the abolition of war, of which the members pledged themselves 'never to enlist or enter into any army or navy, or to yield any voluntary support or sanction to any war, by whomsoever, or for whatsoever purposes, declared or waged.' It is said that within a year there were several thousand of these 'conscientious objectors' enrolled in the United Kingdom, and an equal number in America. Burritt took the lead in carrying peace propaganda into France and Germany. In the latter country, as we shall see, he was associated with Sturge in one of the most interesting episodes of their lives. Cobden describes him somewhat critically as having all the harmlessness of the dove, without the slightest admixture of the serpent's wisdom; but there can be no doubt that his 'harmlessness' was of that penetrating, childlike nature, which inspires commonplace men and women with a new vision of the Kingdom of God on earth.

A far greater name than either of the last two is that of Richard Cobden. Notwithstanding his misplaced confidence in the virtues of the competitive system of industry, we may regard him as, perhaps, *the* most prophetic and inspired of nineteenth-century statesmen. In the thirties he had published two famous pamphlets against armed intervention abroad, urging that the principle of moral persuasion should be substituted for the use of cannon and musketry in attempting to improve foreign communities. He took up the cause of Free Trade largely because he regarded it as an indispensable security for peace. And, after the victory of the Anti-Corn-Law League in 1846, international peace and its corollary of disarmament became the first interest of his life. His private correspondence shows that his abhorrence of war was inspired by the highest moral grounds; yet in his public speeches he tended to put utilitarian arguments first. 'Until,' so

he wrote to Sturge in 1850, 'you can convince the public that they have no *pecuniary* interest in violating the first principles of the New Testament, you will not, I fear, make us a nation of Christians.' This attempted short-cut to righteousness was surely a mistake, and largely accounts both for the delusive growth and the distressing collapse of the peace movement of the time. The adhesion, however, to that new movement of such a famous and successful politician as Cobden prevented it, more than any other single circumstance, from appearing the impractical and utopian business that its enemies described it to be.

The friendship between Richard Cobden and Joseph Sturge dates from the early days of the Anti-Corn-Law League. From about 1846, as is shown by the frequent letters that have survived, it became, owing to their common enthusiasm for peace, a very close and binding one. In July, 1851, Sturge ends his letter 'affectionately thy friend,' adding that he is adopting henceforward this new style, because they are so closely 'united in opinion and labour.' Cobden was worried sometimes at his friend's entreaties to him to force the pace (as he himself thought) unwisely; and he did not always trust his judgment on matters of policy, or his tact when urging avoidance of all shadow of compromise. But he evidently valued very highly his tremendous perseverance, his unfailing optimism, and his self-sacrificing enterprise. 'Sturge,' he wrote in a letter of 1853 to Richard, 'is capable of accomplishing anything.' He confided very touchingly in the warm-hearted Quaker, and the letters of outspoken Christian encouragement and consolation which the latter wrote to him must have been a comfort to him in his arduous parliamentary struggles.

Cobden's view of the part played by the Quakers in the peace movement is interesting, and relevant to the circumstances of to-day. In the House of Commons, when bringing forward his arbitration motion of 1849, he claimed to represent a strong group of Christians, who 'repudiate war, both offensive and defensive.' In 1853 he wrote to a political friend:—'The soul of the peace



movement is the Quaker sentiment against all war. Without the stubborn zeal of the Friends, there would be no Peace Society and no Peace Conference. But the enemy takes good care to turn us all into Quakers, because the non-resistance principle puts us out of court as practical politicians of the present day.'

Cobden believed that it was possible for the 'lesser-armaments' people and the 'no-armaments' people to co-operate with advantage to one another. The Peace Congress Movement, he wrote in a pamphlet of the year 1853, unites these two parties without the need of 'wounding the conscience of my friend Mr. Sturge and his friends of the Peace Society, upon whose undying religious zeal, more than all besides, I rely for the eventual success of the peace agitation.'

The international ferment of 1848 suggested to Elihu Burritt and others of these Christian enthusiasts that they should take up the beginning, which had been made in the World Convention of 1843, and invade the European Continent with the propaganda of Peace. Accordingly, by dint of manifold exertions and arrangements, there was inaugurated in that year a series of International Peace Congresses. The moment was a well-chosen one, and the wave of democratic internationalism which the revolutions liberated secured temporarily for the peace cause results undreamt of in earlier years. Things which before could only be spoken in the ear within closed doors were now boldly proclaimed from the house-top. National prejudices seemed to be breaking down, and millions, in spite of the dark shadows of the time, began to look forward to a new era of reconciliation.

The first Congress was at Brussels. It has for us no special features of interest, though, as being far more truly international than the earlier attempt of 1843, it must have been intensely impressive to the participants.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In a contemporary poem (*The Peace Convention at Brussels*) written to celebrate this Congress, Whittier singles out for special



The succeeding Paris Congress of 1849 was noteworthy as having the poet Victor Hugo for its President. After Cobden, he was the greatest ornament and inspiration of the movement. In impassioned periods he anticipated the federation of the world and the increased brotherhood of nations, calling upon the peoples to 'love one another.' The two subsequent Congresses at Frankfort and London will be noticed in later chapters. At all of these meetings the resolutions carried were of very similar character. It was recommended that arbitration treaties should be formed between all governments; that a code of International Law should be drawn up to regulate the relationships of nations, who would appoint delegates to a permanent Universal Congress; that the practice of armed intervention in the affairs of another nation should be discontinued; that no foreign loans for the prosecution of war should be negotiated; that a general and simultaneous disarmament should take place; finally, that, in all countries, the school, the pulpit, and the press should be used to the utmost to encourage pacific feelings and to convince the public of the sinfulness of war. About some of these resolutions there was doubtless a want of practical grip; but they appeared to be trustworthy foundations upon which the pacific organisation of the world could be erected later.

mention Cobden, Burritt, Sturge, and the Chartist Henry Vincent. The following lines represent a portion of the sneering comments, which the poet supposes the cynics to make in regard to the peace campaign:—

' No! let the cravens plead the weakling's cant,  
 Let Cobden cipher, and let Vincent rant,  
 Let Sturge preach peace to democratic throngs,  
 And Burritt, stammering through his hundred tongues,  
 Repeat, in all, his ghostly lessons o'er,  
 Timed to the pauses of the battery's roar;  
 Check Ban or Kaiser with the barricade  
 Of " Olive Leaves " and Resolutions made,  
 Spike guns with pointed Scripture-texts, and hope  
 To capsize navies with a windy trope;  
 Still shall the glory and the pomp of War  
 Along their train the shouting millions draw.'

It must not be thought that Joseph Sturge and the many others who attended these Congresses were under the pathetic delusion that the era of universal peace had already begun. On the contrary, they had before their eyes the progressive triumph of reaction over democracy in Europe, and they desired, before it was too late, to do something to avert still greater evils. Victor Hugo in 1849 had to deplore that the nations of Europe together expended each year upon military and naval establishments the sum of 120 millions sterling. Two years later Cobden was facing in Great Britain a military and naval outlay of fifteen and a half millions, or thirty-one per cent. of the whole public expenditure. He declared at the London Congress of 1851 that, if the nations went on increasing their armaments, war would be inevitable; the very existence of huge masses of armed men would precipitate it. In the year 1913-14, the increase of armaments, which Cobden had dreaded, had so developed that this country alone spent over seventy-seven millions, or about thirty-nine per cent. of her national public expenditure, upon her navy and army. Quite apart from more immediate causes, was it likely that the nations would avoid Armageddon, when they were content to go on living from year to year upon so monstrous and inflammable a powder magazine? We must lament that the sentiment which seemed so vigorous in 1849 was soon after dissipated by the ignorant prejudices which produced, and were in their turn accentuated by, the series of cruel wars that raged between 1854 and 1871; and that, during the subsequent years of peace, in spite of the warnings and efforts of a few men, neither the Christian Churches nor the public grasped the extreme urgency of disarmament. The nations drifted on helplessly, until, at last, the disastrous day prophesied by Cobden arrived, when the inevitable conflict was precipitated by the Power that was best prepared for war and, at the same time, most thwarted in the natural desire for colonial expansion.

## CHAPTER IX

## A GERMAN ADVENTURE

THE name of Joseph Sturge does not appear very frequently in the official reports of the Peace Congresses to which we have been referring. Nevertheless he attended them all, took a large part in the work of organisation and arrangement, and moved about incessantly behind the scenes, with such good effect that Henry Richard, whose official position as Secretary of the Peace Society must have enabled him to judge correctly, says that he was to a large extent their animating spirit. His qualities of unwearying activity, of intense purity of aim, his effacement of self, and above all his sunny cheerfulness of mind combined to secure him this place of honour among his fellow workers. We will now describe an episode arising out of one of the Congresses which reveals him as a man of courage and initiative.

The third Congress of the series was held at Frankfort on the Main in August, 1850. On this occasion a determined, but, alas, too isolated attempt was made to secure the co-operation of German opinion with English in the cause of Peace. For over a century Britain had been connected with Germany, through the fact that its sovereign was also ruler of Hanover. Yet there seems to have been no organised attempt to secure any spiritual understanding between the two nations. They lived their lives apart. France was the actual or potential enemy of both. The leaders of opinion were blind to the terrible possibilities of the future, and apathetic to the need of international solidarity. And these statements are almost as true of the fifty years following the Frankfort Peace Congress as they



are of the previous century. And yet the experience of the British delegates in 1850 should have served as an urgent stimulus to later efforts. Before the Congress, Sturge's two associates, Henry Richard and Elihu Burritt, spent some weeks in an extended tour through both Northern and Southern Germany, in which they sought to arouse interest in the cause. Germany was at that period struggling to achieve national unity and independence; it was probably felt that the policy of foreign intervention and of upholding the balance of power in Europe, which Lord Palmerston followed, was unfavourable to a united Germany. At any rate the two Anglo-Saxons, though they met with a good deal of response to their advocacy of peace, found a distressing prevalence of national prejudice, combined with a frequent expression of the sentiment that England was Germany's greatest enemy. What should Christian England have done in the face of such a discovery? What else but initiate a continuous campaign for the removal of these suspicions, and of any real reasons that underlay them, a campaign for the enlightenment of Germans as well as English, for the building of bridges between the best minds in both countries, which the threatenings of war could never snap? As it turned out, there were sixty years and more available for such efforts. The task of reconciliation was attempted too late, and then but half-heartedly, except for a devoted few. The world is reaping now the bitter fruits of this and many another error.

Superficially at any rate the Frankfort Congress was encouraging. Germany was still to a large extent in the mood of enthusiastic but tumultuous democracy which burst forth throughout Europe in the year of revolutions. The German revolutionary tricolor of black, red, and gold still draped the Lutheran Church in which the Peace Congress met; the Church itself was famous as the meeting-place of the democratic national Diet, which was the short-lived child of 1848. The British delegates were some five hundred in number, including Cobden, whose presence could not but command widespread respect. Joseph

Sturge was active behind the scenes as usual, and we find him taking the chair at two informal 'friendship' gatherings of a social nature. The customary resolutions were passed during the sessions. But on the last day a remarkable incident occurred. A war was at that time raging between Denmark and the allied Duchies of Schleswig-Holstein. It was in connection with this conflict that a certain Dr. Bodenstedt of Berlin, well known as a writer and Liberal politician, appeared in the Congress with a document in his hand, signed by the ambassador of Schleswig-Holstein in Berlin and by important persons in that city, entreating the Congress to appoint a commission of inquiry into the matters at issue between the belligerents, with a view to settlement by arbitration. The appeal was a dramatic and moving one; but its presentation had to be ruled out of order, as being a digression to contemporary political events. This decision was generally regarded as wise. Some, however, of those present, having something at least of that faith which can remove mountains, felt keenly that the matter must not be allowed to drop, without an attempt of a less public kind to bring to an end the horrors of war. Foremost among these were the three friends, Richard, Burritt, and Sturge. They found encouragement in the project of peacemaking from the ambassador of the Duchies in Frankfort and from German delegates at the Congress, by whom they were advised to travel, via Berlin, to the seat of the Schleswig-Holstein Government. This they accordingly decided to do. At the last moment, however, Richard had to give up his place to Frederick Wheeler, an earnest Quaker from Rochester.

The story of this extraordinary mission is one that deserves to be better known. To find a parallel we have to go back into mediæval times, to the similar attempts of the early Franciscan brothers in Italy, or of the good Cardinal of Périgord, who on the eve of the battle of Poitiers trotted to and fro on his palfrey in unavailing efforts to make peace between the marshalled armies of England and France. It must be understood that these three 'ambassadors of



Christ ' never contemplated offering *themselves* as arbiters upon complicated issues of which they had only a superficial knowledge. Their sole object was to induce the belligerents to submit the questions in dispute to impartial and competent umpires to be chosen by agreement. This intention, with the circumstances which had led up to it, and some appropriate words concerning that war, was clearly set out in a German document which they had had drawn up to carry with them. They had the advantage of being able to appeal to the terms of a seventeenth-century treaty of alliance between Denmark and the Duchies, which provided for a recourse to arbitration in the event of disputes.

It is needless to enter here into the exact issues of the Schleswig-Holstein question. Lord Palmerston used to boast that there were only two other men in Europe, besides himself, who understood them. The dispute was mainly as to whether Denmark or the German Confederation should exercise suzerainty over the two Duchies, which included within their borders a minority of Danes and a large majority of Germans. From the year 1848 the Duchies, under a provisional government, had been in revolt against the suzerainty of Denmark; and they were at first assisted in carrying on the war by Prussia and the German Confederation. In July, 1850, however, these powerful allies deserted the Duchies, and made peace with Denmark. For the next four or five months Schleswig-Holstein carried on the war single-handed, being gradually compelled to abandon more and more of its territory to the invading Danes. This was the state of affairs when Sturge and his friends set out for the theatre of war.

Sturge's revered friend, William Forster, was at this period engaged in a series of visits to the sovereigns of Europe, as bearer of a memorial from the Society of Friends in reference to slavery and the slave trade. He had quite recently secured an interview with the King of Prussia, in which he begged him to use his influence in the direction of abolishing both slavery and war. In the previous year he had had a similar interview with the King of Denmark;



and on his way home he had passed through the country desolated by the war of which we are speaking. These facts must have contributed to stir up Joseph Sturge to his present mission. We know, however, that he had no over-sanguine estimate of its possibilities. Writing home from Frankfort before he started, he says that he had 'come to the conclusion that, if he returned home without making some attempt, and if afterwards there was another battle between the contending parties, he should feel some self-reproach'; adding, 'I feel little expectation of any benefit from the attempt, except a conviction that we have done what we can to prevent the continuance of the war. I hope we shall do no harm.' To the spirit of prayerful humility, with which they started, is probably due the large measure of success that the deputation obtained.

From Sturge's letters to his family we are enabled to sketch the events of the following month. The railway journey from Cologne to Berlin took in those days about twenty-four hours. At the capital they were impressed by the fixed bayonets of the station guards and the troublesome formalities connected with their passports. Amid the excitement of many interviews for the purpose of securing information and introductions they found time to 'read a chapter and sit down in silence together.' Their intended visit had got into the Berlin newspapers, and finding themselves objects of notoriety, they hastened away on their journey, by way of Hamburg, to Kiel the chief town of Holstein. At Hamburg they met a German professor of the name of Worms, who gave them much assistance throughout their mission, and afterwards visited England in the interests of Peace. The provisional government of the Duchies was at that time in the hands of two 'Statthalters,' whose place of residence was in the fortified town of Rendsburg. After calling upon 'members of the Assembly' and others in Kiel, they took a carriage and horses for the drive to this place, and we have a pretty description of the farm-houses, with their conspicuous storks' nests, which they passed on the way. At Rendsburg

they found all the stir of a camp near the firing line. They were soon ushered into the presence of the Statthalters, who were supported by the Ministers for War and Foreign Affairs. These gentlemen appeared to be very friendly, and stated that they would be willing to refer the issues of the war to an impartial tribunal, provided Denmark would also do the same. In spite of Burritt's linguistic talents, it was Sturge who acted as chief spokesman for the deputation, explaining their aim, and their purpose of proceeding to Copenhagen, so as to approach the Danish Government also. (It is remarkable, by the way, how many Germans, among those they met, were able to converse in English.) After the interview there followed an introduction to the Duke of Augustenburg (the claimant to the throne of the Duchies) and a dinner party. The good Quakers must have felt in strange company amongst this warlike assembly. Here is Joseph Sturge's description of it.

'At dinner the Statthalter requested me to sit next to the Duke, who was in full uniform. . . . On my right sat a professor from Berlin, who could talk English, and to whom, in answer to some question, I endeavoured to explain, as well as to one or two others who understood English, my views on the Christian ground of the unlawfulness of war and the inviolability of human life. The Duke also noticed my refusal to take wine, and I had an opportunity of explaining our reasons for doing so. To show the lamentable nature of this unnatural war, a gentleman who sat opposite me at table was the *brother* of the general of the Danish army, while he had four sons in the Holstein army; so that, if this war is not put a stop to, some of them will probably be killed in battle by orders given by their own uncle—a case similar to my giving orders to shoot Charles' or Edmund's children! Indeed, I am told that there are brothers of the *same* family in each army; and yet it was but too evident that, from the highest to the lowest, the Holsteiners are anxious for another battle, and to die rather than be beaten. The only Englishman we met at dinner there, I am sorry to say, seemed trying to inflame this feeling.'

After dinner they again left for Kiel and went on board the Lübeck boat for Copenhagen. Here they were placed

for five days in a pleasant form of quarantine, which must have been a welcome rest for the travellers. To their great satisfaction they found no difficulty in securing a private interview with the Danish Premier himself. Sturge again explained their aims, and described their reception in Rendsburg, concluding by an entreaty to Denmark to put an end to the unnatural and deplorable war, and to accept a mode of settlement which should heal the breach which the sword had made between those who should be brothers. On this occasion Sturge's anxiety about the result of an interview, upon which so much seemed to depend, caused him to be quite overcome with emotion, as he made his appeal. The Prime Minister appeared to be touched; at any rate he was most cordial, and referred them to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. This personage was still more sympathetic and himself dilated on the folly of war. He gave them a second interview, and, when pressed to say whether the Danish Government took the responsibility of rejecting the proposition of arbitration or not, he replied that, if a proposal from the Government of the Duchies were forwarded to them in an official and tangible form, his Government would very favourably consider it. Some days later he went further than this, and gave to Burritt, who remained at Copenhagen, a distinct assent to the principle of arbitration.

Meanwhile the other two knights-errant of Peace were again posting over sea and land. They paused at Hamburg to see the friendly Professor and to visit the Duke of Augustenburg. At Kiel they were at once taken before the Foreign Minister for Schleswig-Holstein, to whom they gave a full outline of the reception of the arbitration proposals at Copenhagen. The Minister was evidently impressed, and proceeded to discuss with them the constitution of the Court of Arbitration. Though violent fighting was in progress at the time, he seems to have persuaded his Government to appoint a professor from Lübeck to negotiate further on the subject, while the Danish authorities also on their part appointed an unofficial negotiator. The hopes of a



settlement through these channels appeared promising, and Joseph Sturge, feeling that his task was done, returned home.

Chevalier Bunsen, the high-minded ambassador of Prussia in London, was still less than Prince Lichnowsky a typical representative of 'Prussianism.' He told Cobden that he had a stronger hope of a satisfactory settlement of the war from the embassy of the three Quakers than from all that had been done by the professional diplomatists of Europe. Unhappily within a few weeks these high personages interfered once more. First Prussia and Austria, and later on all the Great Powers insisted that the Duchies must give way and accept the suzerainty of Denmark. The injustice of this settlement to the preponderating German population of Schleswig-Holstein was naturally highly unacceptable to public opinion in Germany. The inevitable result, as soon as the nationalist genius of Bismarck became paramount in the Prussian Government, was the war of 1864, in which Denmark was finally driven out of the disputed provinces, which were subsequently united with Prussia.

Cobden, whose practical mind had not hoped much from this apparently quixotic enterprise, was considerably impressed by the honourable reception with which the informal peace envoys had met. We have some interesting letters, which the statesman wrote to his friend after his return. 'You have done good work,' he wrote, 'never mind the sneerers!' . . . 'There is a blessing not only for the peace-makers, but for all who attempt that holy office in earnestness and sincerity.' A little later Cobden again referred to the subject as follows: 'You have done good service by breaking through the flimsy veil with which the diplomatists of the world try to conceal their shallow craft, and penetrating into their mysterious domain, by your startling expedition to Rendsburg and Copenhagen. . . . If Russia, England, and France, or either of them, had interfered with the sincere and disinterested and single-minded aim which actuated you and your friends, peace would have been secured in a week.'

## CHAPTER X

## THE CRIMEAN WAR

THE opening, in 1851, of the first International Exhibition, of which the Crystal Palace still survives as a monument, was a singularly convenient and appropriate time for the fourth of the great Peace Congresses, held that year in London. Joseph Sturge took a house adjoining the Exhibition and gave a series of receptions to representatives of the different nations, at which such topics as Peace, Anti-Slavery, and Temperance were discussed on successive evenings. His heart was uplifted by the hopeful signs of amity around him, and he little guessed the valley of strife and desolation into which he was soon to plunge.

At the opening of this Congress a characteristic letter had been read from Thomas Carlyle, concluding with the shrewd words: 'Truly I wish you all speed possible; well convinced that you will not too much extinguish the wrath that dwells as a natural element in all Adam's posterity.' In the following December Louis Napoleon carried out the sanguinary *coup d'état*, that made him dictator of France. This was the chief event that waked to life the fear and wrath which, as Carlyle truly surmised, was smouldering in the hearts of the British public. Another disturbing factor was the visit to England about the same time of the eloquent Hungarian revolutionary Kossuth. The Radicals of Birmingham gave this patriot a triumphant reception, and listened to him for over two hours declaiming against the tyranny of Austria and of Russia. A year later Napoleon assumed the Imperial crown and the fear of a French invasion fanned the war-spirit in the country into a blaze. There were not wanting, too, militarists of the old

school who boldly proclaimed the virtues of war, asserting that its glories and its sacrifices were needed to arrest the enervation caused by a long period of peace. This was the spirit in which the warlike Tennyson could write somewhat later in *Maud* that now 'the long, long canker of peace is over and done.'<sup>1</sup>

The superficial character of most of the popular enthusiasm generated by the Peace Congresses was now revealed. As a popular movement the agitation collapsed. Cobden and Bright, with those of the Peace party who remained faithful, threw themselves into the effort to stem the war-fever, and were roundly abused in consequence. Sturge was, of course, indefatigable. At the height of the French panic, a Peace Conference was arranged at Manchester. With reference to this gathering Henry Richard writes in his diary: 'Good Joseph Sturge's confidence is enviable. The warlike excitement which still prevails in this country, and the certainty that the whole press will be against us, afford no ground for a misgiving or momentary hesitation with *him*, as to the wisdom and sure success of the Conference.' This was in January, 1853. But during the next few months an extraordinarily rapid change took place, not in the violence, but in the direction of the popular fear and hatred. Russia showed signs of going to war with Turkey, and in a very short time Russia became the enemy, and France was transformed into 'our gallant ally.' In July Sturge wrote as follows to an American correspondent:—

'We are here in much uneasiness as to whether this Russo-Turkish affair may not lead to a European war. What strangely inconsistent beings professing Christians are! A few months ago Louis Napoleon was held up as a monster in human shape, and we were put to great expense to prepare against the pretended danger that he and his people would turn pirates, and suddenly come over to murder and rob us. Now we are uniting our fleet with that of this very monster, to fight with the Turks against a professedly Christian

<sup>1</sup> *Maud*, Part III, (iv): text of the first (1855) edition, softened in later editions, presumably as being too strong for the less military spirit of subsequent years.



country, whose Emperor tells us that he has no object of conquest in view, but solely the protection of his fellow-Christians from the persecutions of those Turks for whom English and French Christians are so ready to fight.'

We are not concerned here with the immediate causes of the Crimean War. Broadly speaking, Russia claimed, as Sturge wrote, to be fighting for the protection and liberation of the oppressed Christian subjects of Turkey, while England entered into the war to check the aggressive designs of Russia and to keep the balance of power by maintaining 'the integrity of the Ottoman Empire.' There was also a vague and delusive idea, which influenced many of Sturge's democratic friends, that we were going to secure the liberties of the downtrodden Hungarians and Poles. The danger of war became more and more imminent. In October the British and French fleets were sent up to Constantinople, and Turkey, encouraged by this support, declared war upon Russia. In November a small Turkish squadron was destroyed by the Russian fleet in a Black Sea harbour, and the whole of England was roused to a fever heat of indignation over the so-called 'massacre of Sinope.' There was still a Peace party in the Cabinet, but on January 13th an ultimatum was sent to the Czar requiring every Russian warship in the Black Sea to return to port.

Meanwhile Joseph Sturge was in anguish and sorrow of soul. He and his associates were doing their utmost to plead with their fellow-citizens at home against the folly of war. Was there anything that could be done abroad? Was it not conceivable that an earnest personal appeal from the Society of Friends might touch the heart of the autocrat of all the Russias, the man on whose word, more than on that of any other individual, the issue of peace or war seemed to depend?

We find Sturge, during the Christmas days of 1853, debating with his Quaker friends this idea of a deputation to the Czar. It was not in their eyes by any means so strange and fantastic a plan as it might appear in our own,

or in those of the general public of the day. Personal interviews with monarchs from time to time, for the presentation to them of 'religious concerns,' had for long been almost a traditional custom amongst the Friends. These visits were undertaken as a rule with such a sense of solemn responsibility that we are not justified in attributing to those who paid them any vain desire for consorting with exalted personages. The belief in their efficacy was probably largely based on Biblical precedents; it is as a rule difficult to discover that any good at all proportionate to the effort was accomplished. Sturge's friend Forster had, in the course of the years 1849-51, personally submitted the Friends' Anti-Slavery Memorial to at least nine of the sovereigns of Europe. He was, in the winter before the Russian war, engaged, as an old man of seventy, in the much more formidable task of presenting the same memorial to the Governors of the Slave States of America, and was already in this January, though Sturge did not know it, overtaken by the illness of which he shortly afterwards died.

There was, moreover, a traditional connection between the Friends and the Czars of Russia. In 1698 Peter the Great, while studying shipbuilding in London, more than once attended the Deptford Friends' Meeting. In 1814 the Czar Alexander I. had also attended a Meeting in London, and became so attracted to Friends, that he invited some of them to settle in Russia. A certain Daniel Wheeler accordingly entered his service, and was engaged for a long time in farming one of the imperial estates. On one occasion he and the well-known missionary Friend, Stephen Grellet, spent a time of religious exercises with Alexander, at which they seemed to feel 'in a precious manner the wings of heavenly love stretched over them.' Nicholas I., who was the reigning Czar in 1854, succeeded his brother Alexander in 1825, and must have had some knowledge of the character of the Friends, especially as he had twice visited England. At any rate there was a presumption that a religious appeal from the Society would weigh more with him than with most monarchs.



Such an appeal was accordingly drawn up, after a solemn time of prayer, by the 'Meeting for Sufferings,' as the executive body of the Friends is still called, though its chief duties are no longer those of attending to the victims of persecution. At the same time Joseph Sturge, Robert Charleton, and Henry Pease of Darlington were appointed to present the address to the Czar, being earnestly commended 'to the help and guidance of that wisdom which is from above.' Three days later, on January 20th, 1854, this deputation left London. On the eve of the day of departure, Joseph wrote to his brother: 'Thou canst have hardly less hope than I have of good from our mission, and it seems more than probable that we shall have to return before getting to Petersburg. I may be wrong, but I have scarcely an anxiety of personal safety, either from the climate or from the Czar, beyond the ordinary uncertainty of human life.' At the same time a fortnight's journey by rail and sledge amid the rigours of a Russian winter was no light thing for a man in his sixty-first year. He also wrote to Charles Sturge about his will, and, with a truly remarkable thoughtfulness at such a time, left detailed directions on two matters that concerned the welfare of his fellow-citizens—the proposed establishment of a Temperance Home for sailors at Gloucester, and the supply of his employees with flour at a rate below the market price, which was then high.

The travellers went by rail through Berlin to Koenigsberg. Here they hired a carriage which took them to Riga, from which town it was a sledge journey of three days to St. Petersburg through the frozen snow. Their sledge needed a team of six, and the horses were constantly changed. They met with nothing but civility from the Russians, and had no serious mishaps, in spite of several adventures in the deep snowdrifts that they encountered on the banks of the great Lake Piepus. At the capital they found a welcome from some of the British residents, but wisely avoided communicating with the Embassy, which had not yet actually left the country, though the Russian



Ambassador had already been withdrawn from London.<sup>1</sup> Within a day or two they had an interview with the Imperial Chancellor, Count Nesselrode. He was said to be opposed to the policy of war—at any rate he was most courteous, and after the interview sent his secretary to conduct them round the Palace and other sights of the city. Sturge wrote that he was himself so filled with concern as to the approaching conversation with the Czar, that he could not enjoy his sight-seeing, ‘even if I had not very much outlived my curiosity with respect to such matters.’

At half-past one on February 10th Nicholas received the three Quakers. What followed is thus described by one of them—Robert Charleton:—

‘At the appointed hour we repaired to the palace, and were received by the Emperor at a private interview, no one else being present excepting Baron Nicolay, who acted as interpreter, the Emperor speaking in French. After the address had been read by Joseph Sturge and presented to the Emperor, the latter asked us to be seated on a sofa, while he took a chair and entered into free conversation, kindly giving us a full opportunity for making any verbal statement that we might wish to offer. Joseph Sturge then proceeded to give expression to what had rested on his mind, not entering into the political matters involved in the dispute, but confining himself to the moral and religious aspects of the question. In the course of his observations he contrasted the Mohammedan religion (professed by the Turks), which avowedly justifies the employment of the sword, with the religion of Him whose reign was to be emphatically one of *peace*. He also remarked that among the multitude who would be the victims, in the event of a European war, the greatest sufferers would probably be, not those who had caused the war, but innocent men with their wives and children. On our thanking the Emperor for the kind reception he had given us, Joseph Sturge said, with much feeling, that although we should probably never see him again on this side of eternity, we wished him to know that there were those in England who desired his temporal

<sup>1</sup> It must be remembered that Russia and Turkey had already for some time been at war.

and spiritual welfare as sincerely as his own subjects,—when the Emperor shook hands with each of us very cordially, and, with eyes moistened with emotion, turned hastily away (apparently to conceal his feelings) saying, “My wife also wishes to see you.” We were accordingly ushered into the Empress’s apartment, where we spent a short time in conversation with her and her daughter, the Grand Duchess Olga, both of whom spoke English pretty well. The Empress said to us, “I have just seen the Emperor; the tears were in his eyes.”

The address from the Society of Friends which Joseph Sturge read and presented to the Czar was worded thus:—

‘TO NICHOLAS, EMPEROR OF ALL THE RUSSIAS.

‘May it please the Emperor,

‘We, the undersigned, members of a meeting representing the religious Society of Friends (commonly called Quakers) in Great Britain, venture to approach the Imperial presence, under a deep conviction of religious duty, and in the constraining love of Christ our Saviour.

‘We are, moreover, encouraged so to do by the many proofs of condescension and Christian kindness manifested by thy late illustrious brother, the Emperor Alexander, as well as by thy honoured mother, to some of our brethren in religious profession.

‘It is well known that, apart from all political consideration, we have, as a Christian Church, uniformly upheld a testimony against war, on the simple ground that it is utterly condemned by the precepts of Christianity, as well as altogether incompatible with the Spirit of its Divine Founder, who is emphatically styled the “Prince of Peace.” This conviction we have repeatedly pressed upon our own rulers, and often, in the language of bold but respectful remonstrance, have we urged upon them the maintenance of peace, as the true policy as well as manifest duty of a Christian Government.

‘And now, O great Prince, permit us to express the sorrow which fills our hearts, as Christians and as men, in contemplating the probability of war in any portion of the continent of Europe. Deeply to be deplored would it be, were that peace, which to a very large extent has happily prevailed so many years, exchanged for the unspeakable horrors of war, with all its attendant moral evil and physical suffering.

‘It is not our business, nor do we presume to offer any opinion upon the question now at issue between the Imperial Government of Russia and that of any other country; but, estimating the exalted position in which Divine Providence has placed thee, and the solemn responsibilities devolving upon thee, not only as an earthly potentate, but also as a believer in that Gospel which proclaims “peace on earth” and “goodwill toward men,” we implore Him by whom “kings reign and princes decree justice” so to influence thy heart and to direct thy councils at this momentous crisis, that thou mayst practically exhibit to the nations, and even to those who do not profess the “like precious faith,” the efficacy of the Gospel of Christ, and the universal application of His command, “Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven.”

‘The more fully the Christian is persuaded of the justice of his own cause, the greater his magnanimity in the exercise of forbearance. May the Lord make thee the honoured instrument of exemplifying this true nobility; thereby securing to thyself and to thy vast dominions that true glory and those rich blessings, which could never result from the most successful appeal to arms!

‘Thus, O mighty Prince, may the miseries and devastation of war be averted; and in that solemn day when “every one of us shall give account of himself to God,” may the benediction of the Redeemer apply to thee, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God”; and mayst thou be permitted, through a Saviour’s love, to exchange an earthly for a heavenly crown—“a crown of glory which fadeth not away!”’

The Czar, in his verbal reply to this dignified entreaty, did not, of course, accept the position that Christianity is incompatible with war. He said indeed that he abhorred war, and solemnly disclaimed all intention of conquest, aggrandisement, or the ruin of Turkey. He also professed a great esteem for Britain and its Queen. But he declared that he could not be indifferent to what concerned the honour of his country, and that the well-being of the Greek Church in Turkey, from which Russia had received



the blessings of Christianity, could not be sacrificed without dishonour.

There was not much satisfaction to be had out of this, but the Quakers were impressed by, and thankful for, the Czar's courtesy and earnestness, which appeared to be quite sincere. They felt that they had discharged their mission, and were preparing to return homewards, when the attaché, Baron Nicolay, after bringing to them a revised copy of the Czar's reply, begged them to defer their departure, in order to take with them another more official statement, and to visit the Czar's daughter (who had lately been in England), and other members of the royal family. There was a further request (which they wisely declined) that they should select some article of value from the Palace, to take home with them as a souvenir.

When the expected visit took place, the three friends experienced a very changed attitude, in comparison with the cordiality with which they had hitherto been treated. The Grand Duchess received them alone with cold and formal politeness. The reason seemed to them obvious. The mails from England had just arrived, giving an account of the opening of Parliament, of the increase of British armaments, and of the intensely warlike speeches made in the House of Commons. The resentment of the Russian Court and Ministers was evidently aroused; and the Quakers returned home in sadness, though they had the satisfaction of having a special Government courier to assist them on their journey.

One can imagine the astonishment and indignation with which the English press and public heard of this mission to the autocrat who was represented as an aggressive tyrant of the worst description. The *Times* had indeed begun by expressing something like admiration for the sincerity and courage of the peace theorists. But it soon repented itself, and proceeded to attack the Quakers in a vein of coarse ridicule and invective. The advocates of peace are always abused as madmen or traitors; and it is easy to guess what Joseph Sturge had to suffer during the

course of the war for his dealings with England's arch-enemy just before its commencement. It was asserted that the Czar was at first misled into over-estimating by an enormous degree the strength of the peace party in England; and secondly, that when, subsequently, the English mails arrived, he became furiously angry, and that this fit of anger precipitated the war. The first of these assertions (repeated, *e.g.*, in Lord Wolseley's autobiography) should be amply disproved by a perusal of the Friends' address quoted above, and by the Czar's knowledge of the religious character of the body.<sup>1</sup> The second suggestion was taken up by Kinglake and published to the world in his *Invasion of the Crimea*. But the brilliant Kinglake was an untrustworthy historian, and no evidence of the story of the Czar's anger has ever, we believe, been produced. Its improbability is indicated by the fact that when, very shortly after the end of the war, the widow of Nicholas was seen (more than once) by a woman Friend, Christine Alsop, on the Riviera, she referred, in the course of cordial talk, with evident appreciation to the visit of Joseph Sturge and his companions.<sup>2</sup> As to the interview pre-

<sup>1</sup> Herbert Paul (*History of Modern England*, chap. xviii.), who is in no sense a pacifist historian, writes, in reference to the mission: 'That he (Nicholas) and Count Nesselrode believed these gentlemen, or the Peace Party in general, to have any real influence upon public opinion in England, is incredible.' Spencer Walpole, probably the most trustworthy historian of the period, does not mention the undertaking at all.

<sup>2</sup> The following statement was made in the year 1911, in response to an inquiry from Joseph Sturge's daughter, Miss Sophia Sturge, by a Russian nobleman, Prince Nicolas Galitzine, who was at that time living at Bandol on the Riviera.

'Ce qui suit, sont mes souvenirs personnels. Je tiens la chose de la fille de l'Empereur Nicolas Ier, la reine Olga de Wurtemberg, que j'eus l'occasion d'approcher à Stuttgart dans les années cinquante. Au moment de la déclaration de la guerre de Crimée, des Amis se présentèrent au palais où résidait l'Empereur et demandèrent à être reçus. Ils furent admis. Dès leur premiers mots l'Empereur fut vivement touché. Il comprit qu'il se trouvait en présence de sincères enfants de Dieu, venus, en dehors de toute idée politique, lui parler selon l'Esprit. L'Empereur, avec des larmes aux yeux, les serra dans ses bras et leur dit, qu'il ne dépendait pas de lui d'arrêter le cours des événements. Si quelque chose aurait pu le faire, ç'aurait été la démarche des Amis faite en dehors de tout calcul humain.'



precipitating the war, by February 10th the mischief was already done. Short of a miracle, war was inevitable at that date.

Cobden thought that the mission to the Czar was a futile proceeding; and we may be disposed to agree that, at such a late date, its success was extremely improbable. But humanity does not progress to greater perfection merely or chiefly by achieved success, but rather by moral effort put forth and repeated again and again in the midst of apparent failure. This is the lesson of the Cross, and it was in the spirit of that great sacrifice, we believe, that this unpopular enterprise was undertaken by the actors in it.

Within six weeks of their return to England, war was declared. Though expected to be short and decisive, it was destined to drag on its course wearily for the next two years. Neither the boundaries of the Empire nor the national existence were imperilled; yet the whole country seemed to become temporarily insane, by that extraordinary hypnotic suggestion that infects in war time both the ignorant and the cultured. This was in spite of the fact that the two most popular statesmen of the day, John Bright and Richard Cobden, denounced the folly and wickedness of the war in the most outspoken and, to unprejudiced minds, convincing language. For their courage they got little but violent abuse; many of those, even, who a year or two before had been expressing upon peace platforms their abhorrence of all war, now turned against them and their Quaker allies. 'The Friends,' wrote Cobden after nine months of war, 'really seem to be the only reliable body everywhere.' It is said that in Birmingham itself, except for two 'Christian Chartist' preachers, there was scarcely a clergyman or minister who did not support the war.

Joseph Sturge was sorely wounded, not only by the contemplation of so much unnecessary suffering, but even more by the disastrous moral effects of the conflict, which seemed to have undone the work of years, and to be absorb-



ing into the tasks of destruction most of the moral effort of the nation. Unpromising as the attempt seemed to be, he felt that he must put other things aside, in order to make a stand for Christ's way of peace. In his letters he declares that his first duty is to devote his talents to 'allay the mad war-spirit,' and to 'bring to an end this great national crime and calamity.' The task proved a burden too heavy for his shoulders. In the first autumn of the war we find him writing to a friend in America:—

'I am going down-hill both bodily and mentally; yet it is cause for thankfulness that we have been permitted so long the privilege of health and strength, and a disposition to labour, however feebly, for the amelioration of human suffering and the promotion of human happiness. But I have often to lament my coldness in love to Him from whom all these blessings flow, and without whose redeeming mercy I can have no hope of being anchored in the haven of eternal rest. Our London Anti-slavery Committee have decided upon a conference of its friends in this country, with any foreign ones that can attend, to consider what can be done for the promotion of the cause. . . . But this sad war absorbs almost all that is good, and promotes all that is evil.'

This letter is the first indication we can find, in his life of incessant activity, of illness. Like John Bright shortly afterwards, he broke down in health under the intense strain. This was in the winter of 1854-5. In February he writes from Torquay, whither he had been taken, that he cannot expect to regain his strength suddenly; but he characteristically adds that both his wife and himself seem to have lately made his bodily state too much a subject of thought. Slowly during the course of 1855 he recovered much, at any rate, of his wonted vitality.

What must have contributed largely to this break-down were the bitter attacks made upon Sturge in his own town and by his own friends. Unfortunately, in addition to other things, he was personally in a very vulnerable position owing to his occupation as a dealer in corn. He was accused at one time of desiring peace, because the war stopped his

profits in Russian grain, at another of conspiring with other merchants to keep up the existing high price of corn. In a printed address 'to my fellow-townsmen of the working classes' he thought it right to reply to attacks of this kind, and to the charge that he was doing the 'enemy's work.' He recalls to his readers how great statesmen like Burke and Fox had temporarily been branded as traitors because they worked for peace during former wars; and reminds them how atrocities, as bad as the Russian ones, were committed by British troops during recent wars in China, India, Burma, and Africa. The document, which is an able one, concludes with this appeal:

'The carnage which has already taken place in the Crimea, the voice of mourning which has been heard in many families in Great Britain, and the increased sufferings of the poor, may be but the commencement of the chastisements of Providence for our national crimes. May these considerations lead us, as a nation, to act more in accordance with that spirit which recognises all mankind as our brethren, and with the example of Him who "came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them"!''

There were a few, however, even among the most warlike, who, while disagreeing with the Quaker leader, kept their respect for him undiminished. It is refreshing, as one turns over the files of the contemporary Birmingham newspapers, to come across, among much abuse of Joseph Sturge and the Peace party, a letter from a supporter of the war, who asks whether it will be creditable to their generation, that posterity, who will not pass unheeded the facts of Mr. Sturge's life, marked as they may be by misjudgments and acts of apparent imprudence, should learn that the war-spirit led his fellow-townsmen to make a "football" and a "target" of one who had worked so nobly for his country.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> History repeats itself. In 1901 during the Boer War, a meeting in the Birmingham Town Hall was violently broken up by a riotous mob. Mr. Lloyd George was the chief speaker, and was described at the time by a Birmingham newspaper as a 'ranting disloyalist,' who 'has spoken, not once but always, as if he were the paid advocate of England's enemies.'

A recent writer has said that to arraign an unjust and unwise war is the only way to prevent another; and that, if Bright and Cobden had not raised their voices against the Crimean war, so that men felt, after its close, that they were right, England would very probably have gone to war with Austria against France in 1859, or again with the Slave Confederacy against the United States in 1861, or with Denmark against Germany in 1864, or with Turkey against Russia in 1878.<sup>1</sup> Five years after the close of the Crimean war, public opinion had so changed that even the *Times* sorrowfully admitted that it had been based on a mistaken policy, and that 'a gigantic effort and an infinite sacrifice had been made in vain.' And Lord Salisbury afterwards confessed that, in the long-standing policy of alliance with Turkey, 'we had put our money on the wrong horse.' Unhappily, however, all that the English advocates of Peace were able to achieve, during the generation following the Crimean War, was to convince their countrymen of the advantages of a somewhat selfish neutrality. Had there been a continuous succession of men like Joseph Sturge, ready to preach at home and abroad with true missionary fervour the essentially mistaken and immoral character of all war and of all preparation for it, the world might have been a very different place from what it is to-day.

<sup>1</sup> G. M. Trevelyan's *John Bright*, chap. x.



## CHAPTER XI

### BINDING UP THE WOUNDS OF WAR

IN February, 1855, Cobden wrote to Henry Richard, reminding him that in a few weeks the newspaper stamp would be abolished, and suggesting that the Peace party should now have a daily paper to advocate the views of the Manchester school. The newspaper stamp was only one of those so-called 'taxes on knowledge,' which hampered the freedom of the press. In consequence of them, daily papers like the *Times* and the *Daily News* had to appear at 5*d.* a copy. The repeal of the taxes was welcomed by Cobden, and still more by Bright, as the opportunity of starting a penny daily which would do something effective to counteract the torrent of misrepresentation and abuse, which nearly all the existing press were pouring upon the advocates of a pacific foreign policy. It was necessary to raise a large amount of capital, in order to launch the new enterprise. Cobden and Bright turned instinctively to Sturge and sought to secure his unrivalled energy and influence for the project. The latter hesitated for some time. He had in times past given a helping hand to many newspapers (such as the *Nonconformist* and the *Pilot* already mentioned); but, with scarcely an exception, they had all either proved very short-lived or else had so swerved, in their anxiety for popular favour, into the advocacy of objectionable lines of policy, that all the trouble and money involved were as good as wasted. However he was finally persuaded; and at once, with his usual indomitable perseverance, he set to work so effectively that, during the course of the last year of the war, by dint of journeys, conferences, and much correspondence, the necessary funds were collected. Richard was installed as

the first (though not very successful) editor; and, just about the time that the Peace Treaty of Paris was signed, the *Morning Star* and the *Evening Star* came into existence. These papers were the subject of pretty constant correspondence between Sturge and his friends Cobden and Bright during the last four years of his life. Only ten days before Sturge's death, Bright wrote to him expressing the opinion that the *Morning Star* was doing great and increasing good, possessing a greater political influence than any London journal, except the *Times*, (which was at the time far ahead of all others). The peace policy of the *Star* was, as was to be expected, not maintained for long in its original purity, but the paper did useful work for a good many years. Justin McCarthy and John Morley were among its successive editors.

When the representatives of the great Powers were gathering in Paris to settle the terms of peace, it was felt to be a valuable opportunity to urge upon the British Government the inclusion in the treaty of the principle of international arbitration, for the universal adoption of which the Peace party had long been contending. With this object an influential deputation, with Cobden at its head, waited upon Palmerston, who was then Premier. But Palmerston preferred, as he himself hinted, 'the dazzling results of war' to 'the solid advantages of peace,' and gave them no hope that anything would be done in the desired direction. This rebuff and other circumstances so disheartened Cobden and most of the rest, that they thought it best to refrain from prosecuting the attempt further.

But Richard felt convinced that a deputation should go to Paris and endeavour to influence the diplomatists of the various countries in favour of an arbitration clause in the Treaty. Sturge alone supported him. 'Thou art right,' he said, 'if no one else will go with thee, I will.' Later on, Charles Hindley M.P., who had been President of the 1843 Peace Convention, agreed to accompany them, and on March 20th, 1856, the three men travelled to Paris, with a

memorial of the Peace Conference Committee praying the plenipotentiaries to insert in the Treaty a provision binding the signatory powers to submit disputes to an impartial body of arbitrators.

It was natural enough to consider it an almost futile task for private individuals, holding the unpopular views of the Peace Society, to attempt to canvass the diplomatists of Europe. Yet in this instance the unexpected was achieved. It is true that they were foiled in their endeavour to get a personal interview with the Emperor Napoleon, an object on which Sturge set great store. But they had a very sympathetic reception from Lord Clarendon, the British representative at the Congress, who said he would do what he could; while other plenipotentiaries, including the Prussian and the Sardinian, took special notice of the memorial. Three weeks, that must have been tedious enough to Sturge, were spent in Paris, to see if more could be done; and when the three men at length returned home, they were not sanguine as to the accomplishment of their object. As soon, however, as the proceedings of the Congress were published, it was found that Lord Clarendon had loyally redeemed his promise, and had spoken so convincingly on the advantages of arbitration, that the following protocol had been drawn up and unanimously adopted:—

‘The plenipotentiaries do not hesitate to express, in the name of their Governments, the wish that States, between which any serious misunderstandings may arise, should, before appealing to arms, have recourse, as far as circumstances might allow, to the good offices of a friendly Power. The plenipotentiaries hope that the Governments not represented at the Congress will unite in the sentiment which has inspired the wish recorded in the present protocol.’

There seems every reason to believe that this important step in the recognition of arbitration would not have been gained, but for the way in which Lord Clarendon responded to the appeal of Sturge and his two friends. The former was deeply moved with gratitude to the statesman for his



co-operation, and wrote him a letter of thanks, which he ended by expressing an earnest desire 'that, when Lord Clarendon shall arrive at that final tribunal to which we are all hastening, when all human praise or censure will be alike indifferent, he may receive the reward of the peace-maker, and, through a Saviour's love, be admitted into that Kingdom, where war and discord are unknown.'

It may be interesting here to trace the apparent sequence of events, of which the foregoing incident forms a part, that led, from small beginnings and by the personal influence of a comparatively few men, to the establishment of the great principle of international arbitration as a substitute for what has been absurdly called the 'arbitrament of war.'

The first modern instance of the successful submission to arbitration of disputes between governments was in the so-called Jay Treaty of 1794, on a question of frontier claims arising between Britain and America. But there was no general disposition to follow up this example. The American Chief Justice, John Jay, from whose services the 1794 Treaty acquired its name, had a son William Jay, who followed in his father's footsteps by also becoming a judge and also rendering assistance to the cause of peace, as well as to that of anti-slavery. When Sturge visited Judge William Jay at his house near New York in 1841, the latter showed him the manuscript of a scheme which he had elaborated, providing for the insertion of a clause in all conventional treaties between nations, mutually binding the parties to submit all international disputes to the arbitration of some one or more friendly powers. Sturge took up the idea with enthusiasm, printed it on his return to England, and in this way it became adopted by the London Peace Society and by the International Peace Congresses of 1843, 1848, and succeeding years. In 1849 Cobden put the substance of it into a motion which he brought before the House of Commons, and secured, in a rather empty House, seventy-nine votes in its favour. The next step is represented by the protocol of the 1856 Treaty.

The cardinal importance of this protocol was recognised at the time by Gladstone, who said in the House of Commons:—

‘As to the proposal to submit international differences to arbitration, I think that it is in itself a very great triumph, a powerful engine on behalf of civilisation and humanity. It is, perhaps, the first time that the representatives of the principal nations of Europe have given an emphatic utterance to sentiments which contain, at least, a qualified disapproval of a resort to war, and assert the supremacy of reason, of justice, humanity, and religion.’

From this time the advantages of arbitration began to be more and more widely recognised. Thus while between the Jay Treaty of 1794 and the year 1856 only thirty-two different disputes between governments were satisfactorily submitted to arbitration, between 1856 and 1899 there were one hundred and forty disputes settled in this way. The most important of these arbitrations was that given on the claim for damages committed by the British-built Confederate cruiser *Alabama* during the American Civil War; its acceptance by both nations almost certainly prevented war between Britain and America. Further, between 1899, the date of the first Hague Conference, and February, 1914, no less than one hundred and ninety-seven separate general treaties of arbitration were made between various powers. They substantially carry out Judge Jay's proposal, except that most of them unfortunately exclude questions of ‘vital interest’ and ‘honour.’ The culminating result of the movement is the ‘Peace Commission Treaty’ between Great Britain and the United States, signed in September, 1914, by which the two Governments agree that ‘all disputes between them of every nature whatsoever, other than disputes the settlement of which is provided for and in fact achieved under existing agreements, shall, when diplomatic methods of adjustment have failed, be referred for investigation and report to a Permanent International Commission’ (consisting of five members); and they further agree ‘not to declare war or begin hostilities during such investigation and before the



report is submitted.' The report must be submitted before the close of a year; and this year is generally regarded as an invaluable 'cooling-off period,' during which, assuming a healthy public opinion, danger of war ought to be averted and a peaceful settlement insisted upon. Finally the agreement to submit disputes to arbitration is one of the indispensable principles to be accepted by all the members of any League or Commonwealth of Nations, which may be formed as a result of the present war.

The above digression appears to be justified by the need of placing in its full setting the humble but important part which Joseph Sturge played between 1841 and 1856 in the evolution of a great practical idea. There was also another way, worthy to serve as a guiding precedent, in which he attempted to make reparation for the injuries of war.

In March, 1854, three weeks before the outbreak of the anticipated Crimean War, a farewell dinner, attended by three Ministers of the Crown, was given at the Reform Club in honour of Admiral Napier. The gallant Admiral was on the eve of departing in command of the British fleet to the shores of the Baltic; the dinner was characterised by an exhibition of almost frivolous enthusiasm, and one of the Ministers present spoke of the fleet as eager to display its prowess, and to make the shores of the Baltic resound with its deeds of naval daring.

It was in a very different spirit that in the September after the close of the war, another expedition left the shores of England for the Baltic coasts. It was an advance guard, going to spy out the nakedness of the land, but in order to clothe that nakedness, not to take advantage of it. The British fleet, finding it impossible to do effective damage either to the Russian warships or to their naval bases, had turned a large part of its attention to the destruction of private property on the coasts of Finland. So Joseph Sturge was going, along with Thomas Harvey, the old companion of his West Indian tour, to see what could be done to alleviate the sufferings caused by these wanton



attacks. They deserve to be called wanton, over and above the usual characteristics of war, because they were inflicted, without any apparent military advantage, upon an unarmed people, who were probably more friendly disposed to the English than to the Russians, who had conquered and annexed their country not half a century before. The British attacks were the more noticeable, as the French fleet, which was also cruising off the coast, abstained from destroying property on shore, or even, it is said, from capturing merchant ships. Admiral Napier was understood to have disapproved of the policy of burning and pillage; but nevertheless, though there were many honourable exceptions, it was practised by the officers of numerous warships, with disastrous results to the Finnish inhabitants. In one case round shot was, according to evidence obtained locally, fired into an open town, with the result that two or three civilians lost their lives; while in another a huge conflagration of shipping and timber was caused by a landing party, in a way to threaten the destruction of the whole township, after the British Commander had proclaimed that he would not 'molest or injure private persons or their property.' By the widespread burning of timber, boats, and ships, and the seizure or destruction of nets, cattle, sheep, and stores, large numbers had lost their means of livelihood. Their piteous condition was described by a local correspondent who wrote to the *Times* in June, 1854.

'The number of fugitive Finns increases here every day. Whoever walks round our harbour sees a vast number of ragged people lying about on the stones, whose nocturnal abode is the tents they have contrived out of tattered sails. One shriek of woe sounds all through Finland! It will take many years before those wretched outcasts regain the point which they had hitherto by great assiduity obtained. All their vessels of any size are in the hands of the English and the smaller ones are totally destroyed. All the stock of timber and pitch that they are wont to export to Denmark and even to Germany in the spring, and which constitutes their chief source of livelihood, is reduced to ashes. Anything and every-

thing that might possibly be useful to the Russians has been destroyed.'

Here was surely enough to prompt Joseph Sturge and his friend, as soon as peace made it possible, to go and see on the spot the extent of the suffering, and how it could best be alleviated. It was not a long visit—they were only in Finland just over a fortnight, but they made good use of their opportunities. For want of time they did not reach the two ports where most damage had been done; but at other places, with the aid of an interpreter, they examined poor persons who had been reduced to penury by the acts of war, and satisfied themselves of the need for relief. At the old Finnish capital of Abo they helped to form a Committee of local merchants who undertook to administer the British relief funds. Here very probably they met men who remembered the visit in 1819 of the Quakers Stephen Grellet and William Allen; on which occasion they had been instrumental in pressing the Czar Alexander to improve the deplorable condition of the Abo prison. They found the Finns generally in a state of great exasperation against the English, whom they had previously regarded with esteem. It was the hope of Sturge to make an act of restitution, that would partake somewhat of a national character. He therefore caused it to be known that there were many in England who had shown their disapproval of the conduct of the fleet, and that the relief fund was intended 'not as an act of bounty or of mercy, but of mere justice.' The effect of this seems to have been good.

Whittier, in his rhyme *The Conquest of Finland*, imagines, with pardonable poetic licence, the peacemakers actually replacing the 'foraged beeves and grain' from a ship of bounty that sails round the coast. In a less picturesque way, by means of a Committee of the Society of Friends in England, and through the Finnish Committee on the spot, the equivalent of this was carried out, necessities of all kinds being purchased and distributed. The sum collected was not a large one—about £9,000, but it represented much good-will; one of the gifts actually came from

a naval officer (of H.M.S. *Porcupine*), who is said to have helped in causing the devastation. The relief sent was all the more needed, inasmuch as something approaching to famine conditions prevailed in Finland during the first half of 1857. The collection made at this time was a precedent for the 'War Victims' Relief Funds,' which Friends have organised and administered in more recent wars, including the one now drawing to a close.

On the way back from Finland, Sturge had stopped in St. Petersburg; and there, with characteristic zeal, he penned and despatched an address to the new Czar, Alexander II., in which he and Thomas Harvey wrote that they 'had been led to visit the dominions of the Emperor by motives springing, as they trust, from that Christian love which is not limited by geographical boundaries, nor interrupted by international contests, but which embraces the whole human family, as children of one Father and objects of the same redeeming Love.' At the same time they pleaded with the Czar for the principle of international arbitration, for the free circulation of the Bible in Russia, and for the emancipation of the serfs. The, perhaps, ill-judged emphasis on this last subject was strongly disapproved of by Cobden, who otherwise rejoiced at the results of the visit. A nephew of Sturge, who was sent to Finland in the following year, reported that the feeling of the people towards England had changed very much for the better, owing largely to the helping hand held out to them in their distress.

In the autumn of 1856 we find Cobden writing thus to Richard, as Secretary of the Peace Society:—

'It is really refreshing to see Sturge's inexhaustible energy. He could run a dozen young men off their legs. No sooner is he back from his visit to Russia than he inquires if there is nothing to be done! I have sometimes wondered what such men would do, if the world's crimes and follies did not find them plenty of employment in the work of well-doing.'

In another letter of the same period Cobden says that



'nothing but *action* of some kind would pacify our friend Sturge.' But he himself was pessimistic about the prospects of fresh peace agitation. He felt that their party had 'lost their standing-ground, and been deserted by nineteen-twentieths of those whom they reckoned as their partisans.' And the times were in truth difficult for pacifists. The Crimean War had apparently far from exhausted the aggressive temper of the electorate and the press. They were only too ready to support a warlike policy in Asia, if not elsewhere. Palmerston's Government sanctioned in November, 1856, the declaration of war against Persia, 'in order to repel the first opening of trenches against India by Russia'; and the Ministry also staked their existence on the defence of the outrageous bombardment of Canton, carried out in this same autumn as a reprisal for a trivial and possibly quite imaginary offence on the part of the Chinese authorities. When censured by the House of Commons, in March, 1857, for the war in China, Palmerston dissolved Parliament, and, appealing to the electors on the issue, was returned by a triumphant majority, Cobden, Bright, and most of their followers losing their seats.

The burden of war's wickedness, and in particular of the recurrent use by our Government of this form of organised violence in Asia, under, as it seemed to both Cobden and to himself, peculiarly unjust circumstances, weighed at this time so heavily upon Joseph Sturge's heart, that he felt inclined to put aside most of his other activities in order to vindicate the causes of peace and of a juster Asiatic policy. Little enough support did he find. At a Birmingham meeting in January, 1857, he was received with hisses, when he appealed to the people to withdraw their sanction from the deeds of aggression and cruelty in China and Persia. His heart was sore over the continuance of the opium trade with China. Bright, with whom he corresponds on the matter, gives him no hope for its abolition. 'Crimes,' he wrote to Sturge, 'go together and hang on each other, and the opium trade is but one of a series.' Then there was the

question, often mentioned in Cobden's correspondence, of the exploits of 'Rajah' Brooke in Sarawak (Borneo). Brooke was an adventurer, who had many good qualities, but he had involved himself in enterprises which led to at least two wholesale massacres of natives. When the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce was proposing to petition in favour of Government support for Sir James Brooke, Sturge addressed to them (but without much effect) a long and reasoned letter of protest.

Englishmen have probably less cruelty in their nature than most other Europeans; and they more often consider the true interests of those whom they have taken upon themselves to govern than most other alien rulers are accustomed to do. Yet this does not prove the justice of the domination of coloured races by Englishmen; and it certainly does not justify the aggression and the slaughter by which the conquest of large parts of the Empire has been secured. Perhaps the least admirable feature of most of these campaigns has been the murderous effect upon the ill-armed native warriors of the more deadly weapons of the British troops. Cobden used to describe our victories as not battles, but 'battues.' Both he and Sturge, at any rate, were constantly bowed down by the wickedness of these wars. Writing to Sturge with special reference to the 'Canton massacre,' Cobden says:—'If there be a God ruling the world on principles of retributive justice, we ought to tremble for the punishment, which awaits this nation, for its deeds of blood and violence in the East.'

This was written in April, 1857. In May the Indian Mutiny broke out. Joseph Sturge shared in the general horror created by the ghastly outrages of the Sepoys; but he could not separate these acts from the previous history of our own dealings in India. His feelings are shown in the following extract from a letter to an American friend:—

'It would appear as though Providence were about to visit us for our national guilt, by this rebellion in India. I doubt if there are much blacker pages in history than those which record our conduct in India and China. Many of the facts



have never fully come to light, but there were enough known, to have induced a Christian nation to put a stop to it. It is not only those who were interested in ravaging and plundering those countries that are guilty; but I fear that the great bulk of our people, not excepting ministers of religion, have actively or passively sanctioned it. . . . Had we acted on Christian principles in our government of India, even though we obtained much of it by robbery, the present state of things would not have existed; and yet the advocates of war are ready enough to ask the friends of Peace, how *they* would now get out of a position in which they would never have placed themselves. I never saw more clearly the importance of the existence of a Society like ours [the Society of Friends], upholding the full principles of peace, and I cannot help regretting its rapid decrease.'

While the Mutiny was in process of being stamped out, and the English press was full of wild cries for vengeance upon the participators in the revolt, Joseph Sturge occupied himself with devising how best he could assist in bringing to light the real grievances of the natives of India, and in creating a public opinion, which would insist on their removal. He distrusted a Government investigation as prejudiced; and the success of his West Indian visit, of twenty years before, led him to conceive the idea of sending out a small voluntary commission, who would conduct inquiries on the spot. Already before the Crimean War, he had been in touch, as we know from Cobden's letters, with the India Reform Association in connection with the troubles in Burma. To this body he made an offer to pay for the expenses of such a mission. But war was still going on in different parts of India, and no one could be found willing to undertake the work. So, with rare courage for a man of sixty-four whose health had been much shaken, he determined to go himself. He 'opened his concern' (in the Quaker phrase) to his friend Richard, and found that he was ready to be his travelling-companion. A detailed programme for their inquiries was drawn up. They were to get a full statement from the natives of their grievances, and to establish in India a permanent association



to report to friends in England on matters requiring redress; they were to ascertain the most urgently needed reforms; they were to examine the question of the opium traffic, and also the possibilities of developing the cultivation of cotton and sugar by 'free labour'; they were to bring home, if possible, one or two Indians who could speak for themselves.

The scheme, however, fell through. Englishmen conversant with India advised that the disturbed state of the country, and the extreme terror which had taken hold of the native mind in consequence of the British reprisals for the Mutiny, would make any fruitful inquiry impracticable for the time being. Joseph Sturge was wise enough to take their advice—but his purpose remains on record as yet another brave effort to bind up the wounds of war, and to remove the causes of future strife.

## CHAPTER XII

## EDUCATIONAL EXPERIMENTS

WE have now to deal with a department of Joseph Sturge's work that has left an enduring mark upon the life of his own town. It was in the year 1845, shortly after the death of his beloved sister, when the lonely man doubtless needed the companionship of the youthful and enthusiastic, that he associated himself with some such spirits in a most fruitful experiment in education.

The social conditions of the Birmingham of that day were of a most depressing character; and no feature was more disheartening than the gross and widespread ignorance of its inhabitants. Some seven years previously (and matters had only slightly improved since then), it had been computed that over fifty per cent. of the children in the great city were not receiving any instruction at all in either day or Sunday school, while many, even of those who had been to a school, had attended so inadequately that they grew up without knowing how to read a book. Boys and girls were employed in the factories from the age of eight years and even younger. Saturday half-holidays were unknown. There was not a free library or recreation ground in the town; and there were only a few elementary schools, supported with difficulty by voluntary subscriptions, and without any Government grant towards maintenance. There was no public provision at all for the education of the thousands of adults and young people, who had grown up ignorant. Owing to the long hours of toil, the only possible time for giving them instruction was on Sunday, a day apt to be spent, as was natural in such circumstances, in lounging, drinking, and idle mischief.

Often and often must Sturge have sorrowfully observed and meditated upon the needs of the people. At length he determined to make a small beginning towards improvement, by starting a First-day (Sunday) School for youths and men.

The tardy awakening of modern England to the duty of popular education was mainly due to the exertions of pious people in the various religious denominations. The Evangelicals of the period, though usually shamefully indifferent to the material conditions of the poor, were fortunately united in the belief that all members of the community should be able to read their Bible, which they regarded as the indispensable guide to salvation hereafter. Thus, a large proportion of the early nineteenth-century day schools for children were founded by the British and Foreign School Society, an evangelical union in close connection with the London Bible Society; and it was owing to the experience of the latter Society's agents in discovering immense numbers of illiterate persons, to whom the Bible was a closed book, that the first impetus was given to the widespread formation of Sunday Schools for adults. Although some of these Adult Schools dated back into the eighteenth century, it was only in the second decade of the nineteenth, that they came into existence in any large numbers. The most noteworthy and successful of these early schools were probably those founded at Bristol and in North Wales, in or about the year 1811. By 1820, schools had been started in all the larger towns of England and Wales and in many smaller places. Their scope of instruction was, it is true, very limited, and betrayed the narrow aims of the founders of the movement. Beyond capacity to read the Bible, writing was the only subject taught; and provision was usually made that, when pupils could read the Bible satisfactorily, they should be dismissed. Owing partly to this unpopular restriction, the movement seems to have languished during the democratic thirties, the later years of which were indeed too full of misery and discontent to attract many within the walls of



a class-room. But, after about 1841, the gradual improvement of social conditions and the educational ideals instilled into the Chartist movement by such men as Lovett and Vincent created great openings for Adult Schools.

One of these high-minded Chartists was Thomas Cooper, who at Leicester during the agitated winter months of 1841-2 founded flourishing Sunday classes for men, where the Bible and other great literature was read. This was the period of Joseph Sturge's contact with the Chartists. He was on friendly terms with Cooper, and, even if he did not actually visit it, he no doubt knew the character of Cooper's 'Shakespearean School' at Leicester. And Sturge must have had knowledge of other Adult Schools, though we cannot now be certain as to which of them contributed most, or at all, to the new development which he initiated. Adult Schools had been started at Birmingham as far back as 1815, and even earlier, though all of these schools appear to have been by 1842 either decaying or defunct. In Edgbaston itself, where the Sturges lived, two such Sunday Schools for men were in existence during the thirties. One of these, closed in 1840, had some forty members, who met for two hours on Sunday evening; while another, started by a parish clergyman in 1827, was still in the year 1849 attended by about twenty men. In other towns, particularly at Bristol and Nottingham, members of Sturge's religious Society had been fostering schools for years past. The Nottingham example had actually maintained a continuous existence since 1798, under the zealous care of a Quaker grocer, named Samuel Fox. This school became known to Sturge, when he came to Nottingham for the election contest of 1842; and there are reasons for thinking that its example may have been his immediate inspiration in the founding of the Birmingham School three years later.

Though regarded with disapprobation by many of the conservative worthies of his religious Society, Joseph Sturge was loved and revered by the younger Friends, and it was to a group of them that he one day made the sugges-

tion that a First-day School should be opened. There was eager, if somewhat timid, response; and shortly afterwards (in October, 1845,) a handbill was circulated in the streets, conveying the following invitation:—

‘A School is intended to be held on First day (Sunday) evenings, from six to eight o’clock, at the British School-rooms in Severn Street, chiefly for the purpose of affording instruction in reading the Scriptures and in writing, to youths and young men from fourteen years of age and upwards, who are invited to attend.’

On the appointed day a dozen expectant young teachers met, with Bibles and copy-books, and confronted over a hundred illiterate and disorderly youths. A beginning was made, the usual sifting took place, older men made their appearance in considerable numbers and had to be separated from the boys; in spite, however, of all difficulties, good work was done from the start. In the second year a deputation was sent to the Nottingham School to seek guidance from the experience there. As a result, it was decided to change the hours to those of 7.30 to 9.30 o’clock on Sunday morning. This turned out to be a great improvement, that has lasted as a practice of the Birmingham Adult Schools until to-day. As many of the young teachers were apprentices, who could not easily get breakfast before school—and the Friends’ Meeting began within half an hour of its close—Sturge supplied them with seven o’clock breakfasts, at which he constantly presided himself, afterwards (though he took no part in the teaching) opening the session by reading a chapter of the Bible. To many of the teachers the work proved a godsend, developing their interest and their dormant powers of service. In after years they could not speak too warmly of the encouragement which the fatherly Joseph gave to them, at the breakfasts, at the social evenings at his house, and elsewhere. It is surprising to find, however, what objections to the school were advanced by the older people. Some Friends thought it was interfering too much with matters outside the Society, and regarded young persons as unqualified to teach

religion. Others objected to the unchristian practice of teaching writing on Sundays; besides, it was an art, that was not profitable to salvation, and might tempt those who acquired it to the crime of forgery! Notwithstanding, the Severn Street Adult School grew and prospered exceedingly. Many were the men who were rescued by it from vicious habits and from the depths of ignorance. A warm spirit of comradeship was developed, and, as the scholars grew in attainments, the school became more heartily democratic. Within a few years a well-established library and savings bank had been added, and evening classes were held twice a week for arithmetic, grammar, and geography. In the annual report for 1859, the year of the founder's death, the number on the books of the school is given as 535.

A Women's First-day School was started in 1848 and also proved a great blessing. More than forty-five years afterwards one of those who was a teacher on the opening day wrote as follows:—

‘I can remember the feeling of fear and almost awe with which we entered on our duties. The one abiding impression of my class is the affection and devotion dealt out to me, which I had done nothing to merit, for I was very ill able to enter into the various troubles and distresses. I can remember that the older members of my class lived at home under circumstances of extreme trial. Drinking fathers, faithless lovers, cruel masters made up, in their small horizon, dominant humanity. . . . What we owe to Joseph Sturge, the prophet of our town and of the Society of Friends, will never be told. He sowed and watered the seed which is now a great tree, so that the birds come and lodge on its branches.’

In truth the great Adult School movement of to-day owes more to Joseph Sturge's foundation of the Severn Street School than to any other single incident in its varied history. It was in this school that William White became a teacher in 1848, retaining the position for no less a period than fifty-two years. William White's inspiring personality was an immensely important factor in the



progress of Adult Schools, not only in Birmingham but in many other places. It was at Birmingham too, at Sturge's invitation, that a Conference was held in 1847, which resulted in the formation of the Friends' First Day School Association, a Quaker body which for many years guided the movement in all parts of the country, by the provision of lesson sheets and in other ways. In 1899, however, this Association decided to confine itself to the care of children's schools, and gave way to the National Adult School Council. Long before this, the movement had overflowed its original denominational imprint. In 1871 an interdenominational Committee was formed in Birmingham for the purposes of Adult School extension, and in many parts of England<sup>1</sup> schools arose independently of the Society of Friends, and entered into fellowship with those of Quaker origin. Before the present war, with its inevitable disorganisation, the schools associated in the National Adult School Union had a membership of nearly one hundred thousand, of whom over one third were women. Of this fine total the Birmingham district (in 1913) could boast a membership large enough to give an *average weekly attendance* of more than 4000 men (besides women and 'juniors') distributed among about ninety-five distinct schools or classes; while the forty different branches of the Severn Street School had an average attendance of nearly 2350 men in all. The most valuable characteristics of the movement have been its enthusiasm for study; its warm spirit of comradeship; its democratic system, the teacher often taking the rôle of leader in a discussion class; and lastly the wise tolerance which has held up Christian truth to be loved for its own sake, rather than swallowed under constraint, so that the 'seeker' or agnostic, as well as the convinced believer, can feel at home in its gatherings. The present writer can acknowledge gratefully the debt which he himself owes to the movement, in promoting his intellectual and spiritual development.

<sup>1</sup> The number of schools established in the other portions of the United Kingdom is comparatively insignificant.

The founder of the Severn Street School once remarked 'I should not wonder if the School grows to be a thousand strong.' How the good man would have rejoiced had he seen the harvest of uplifted lives, which was to be in large part the fruit of the seed that he had sown!

Sturge was also a generous supporter of elementary education. He believed in giving to the children evangelical Bible teaching, such as the British and Foreign School Society provided in their schools. But he thought it just as unfair to accept the taxpayers' money to maintain schools conducted on such a religious basis, as to give public grants to aid Roman Catholic institutions — a proposal strenuously resisted by the Evangelicals of the day. Consequently he was an uncompromising upholder of the voluntary principle in education, and ceased, in 1845, to support the British and Foreign School Society, when they decided to receive Government grants. Notwithstanding this action, however, he remained on the committee of the local 'British' school near his home, and continued until the day of his death to be a warm friend of the teachers and children of that institution.

The cause of Temperance, like that of Education, also claimed a considerable share of his time. He took some part in the great Temperance crusades that began in the thirties; he is said to have induced, by his personal influence, many of his friends to become total abstainers like himself; and he took a special interest in the newly organised 'Bands of Hope' for children and young people, even finding time, during his busy life, to conduct large parties of them on excursions into the country.

There were other ways too in which Birmingham benefited by his efforts. Thus we find his name on a committee for shortening the hours of business and discouraging, in the interests of the shop assistants, evening shopping. In 1844, when London as yet possessed no public bath, he helped to establish in his own town baths and wash-houses for the people, before the work was undertaken by

the Corporation. At that time the movement for people's parks had been going on for some years; Victoria Park in East London, formed near the beginning of the new Queen's reign, was one of the first of its results. But Birmingham was sadly backward in following this example. So we are not surprised to learn that Sturge, for several years before his death, persevered in urging upon his fellow-citizens the duty of providing suitable parks and open spaces. His feelings may be gathered from an address on the subject issued in December, 1853, 'to the ratepayers of Birmingham,' in the course of which he wrote as follows:—

'On no side of the town is there a green field within a moderate distance, on which even a child can play or walk, without being liable to a prosecution; and in this respect Birmingham is in a far worse position than any other large town in the kingdom. When we have tens of thousands living in houses which have not even a back-door, can we wonder that the rising generation, with no opportunity of healthful recreation, should resort to those places of debauchery and vice which so greatly tend to fill our gaols? And permit me to remind you that the size of your own gaol is still deemed inadequate, although we have recently expended upon it nearly £80,000.'

About the same date he supported his precepts by the force of example. Having secured the lease of a field close to his own house in Edgbaston, he offered to place it rent-free in the hands of the Corporation, as a place of recreation for children especially. When some of his neighbours, with the selfishness that is unhappily often found among comfortable suburban residents, resented this intrusion as an unwarranted nuisance, he sent them a temperate but firm reply, which contained the following expression of his views:—

'I have long held the opinion that in no civilised, not to say Christian, country should the great bulk of the people be deprived of the opportunity of even walking upon a green field, as is the case with a large proportion of the population of this town; I believe that this has contributed not a little to the demoralisation of many of the working classes.



‘I need scarcely remind you that Birmingham forms, in this respect, a marked exception to any place of similar size in England; and that open spaces near cities, for the free admission of the public, are so far from deteriorating property, that, not only the private residences of the nobility near London, but the royal palace itself opens upon them. On the Continent this is still more generally the case; even in Petersburg, under the window of the private cabinet of the late Emperor of Russia, whom the people of England have been taught to consider the very embodiment of despotism and tyranny, I had myself an opportunity of seeing thousands of people assemble for their amusement without restraint.

‘I hope similar accommodation for the public will be found on all sides of the town; but I believe there is no other space of about eight acres equally accessible to children (who have literally no back-door to go out at, and to whom it is especially desirable to afford an opportunity for healthful exercise), the opening of which would affect so small a number of residents on the spot.’

The remonstrants were silenced for the time being; and the venture was a great success. For thirteen years ‘Sturge’s Field’ was a place of daily resort to numbers of poor children, and from his garden Joseph himself had the pleasure of watching them at play. After his death, when the lease had to be renewed, the objections of the ground landlord brought the arrangement to an end. One of Joseph Sturge’s daughters still remembers her sad feelings in seeing groups of little children come up from the town and press up against the gates of the field, which were closed against them. The whole incident is of value as reminding us that the same crying needs are with us to-day; for the monstrous and unregulated growth of our towns has not yet been accompanied by any proper provision of gardens and open spaces.

Adjoining the field was a large house. This was converted by the same benefactor into a hydropathic establishment (hydropathy was the popular cure of the day), at which his poorer neighbours were able to attend and secure skilled treatment, either at a small charge or free, according to their means.

In the year 1818, when the young corn-factor was living in his Bewdley home, a kitchen drawer was broken open and some three pounds in money were stolen from it. Joseph found out that, according to the existing law, a successful prosecution of the thief would make him liable to the punishment of death. Needless to say, he did not prosecute. He probably began from this time to take a warm interest in the sad fate of those young people and children, whom a Pharisaical society termed and treated as 'criminals.' It is somewhat strange that we have come across no record of his having been in touch with the work which Elizabeth Fry carried on in the prisons until shortly before her death in 1845. We do not hear of his visiting English prisons, though he made such visits in the West Indies and the United States. His father-in-law, James Cropper, spent some of the last years of his life (during the thirties) in charge of an industrial school for fatherless and neglected children, which he had founded himself at Fearnhead, near Warrington. This probably directed Sturge's thoughts towards the youthful offender, with whom the prisons of the time were overflowing. While in America in 1841, he visited at Philadelphia a 'Refuge' or reformatory school conducted on enlightened lines for boy and girl offenders. And in his journal he wrote in these strong terms:—

'The greatest deficiency of all in each nation [*i.e.*, England and America] is that of institutions, like the Philadelphia Refuge, co-extensive with the wants of the community, for the reformation of juvenile delinquents; thus suppressing crime in its small beginnings. So long as this want is unsupplied, and the juvenile offender is contaminated by contact with the hardened criminal, the statesmen and those who control the legislatures of both countries dishonour their profession of Christianity.'

Nine years later, Sturge, while engaged in his extraordinary peace mission in Schleswig-Holstein, found time to spend half a day in visiting an industrial home for vagabond children at Hamburg called the 'Rauhe Haus' (*i.e.*, Rough House). This Christian institution seems to have



made a deep impression upon him; and, when at the end of the following year (1851) a National Conference was held at Birmingham to promote the founding of reformatories, he attended and decided in his usual way to get something practical done. He had been told of a remarkable man, John Ellis, a teacher in a London 'ragged school,' who had for some years been employing convicted thieves in his trade of shoemaking. Appreciating the cardinal importance of an affectionate personal influence in restoring the erring child, he succeeded in securing the shoemaker to take charge of an experiment in Birmingham. A house was obtained; sixteen of the worst young gaol-birds, leaders of gangs of thieves and others, were secured from the police, and Ellis was established as the father of this curious family. The results were from the first so promising, that a committee took over the responsibility; and the small home developed into the Saltley Reformatory, which has had a long career of usefulness.

Meanwhile Joseph Sturge, with the co-operation of his brother Charles, bought in 1853 a farm at Stoke Prior, sixteen miles from Birmingham, and added to the buildings schoolrooms, workshops, etc., sufficient for sixty boys. To this school outcast and convicted children were sent through the inspector of police, and later on by magistrates in different parts of the country. A wise and fatherly superintendent was secured, but the founder himself supervised many of the details of management. He would sometimes sleep on the premises, and he endeavoured to make personal friends of many of the boys. His whole heart was in the work, and one can well imagine that, in the agonising days of the Russian War and the Indian Mutiny, the task of befriending and uplifting these ill-used children was a welcome distraction and a blessing to him.

Stoke Farm was not the first reformatory, but it was probably one of the best—less rigidly institutional than most of them have been. A simple education was given to the boys, all being taught either farm work, or tailoring,



or shoemaking. Reliance was placed on the wholesome influence of steady work, carried on in an atmosphere of Christian love. It was characteristic of Sturge that he declined to concede to any clergyman the right of outside interference with the religious training of the lads, on these grounds:—

‘If our superintendent is qualified for his office, we wish all the boys to regard him with the confidence, respect, and affection they would a kind and wise parent, and to have that reliance upon him in regard to their spiritual instruction to which such a parent is entitled. . . . If, through a Saviour’s love, they should become members of His Church, we consider it of little importance to which section of it they may attach themselves, when of an age to judge for themselves.’

The school has been carried on ever since, first by Joseph Sturge’s family, and latterly by a committee. It has rescued hundreds of boys from vicious associations and helped to turn them into good men. It is recognised as a reformatory by the Home Office. Reformatories do not provide an ideal environment for children; but they represent a tremendous advance upon prison, and also, sadly enough, upon thousands of so-called homes, which have been wrecked by human frailty and by the thoughtless greed of our social system.

## CHAPTER XIII

## THE CLOSE OF A FULL LIFE

THE biographies of men who have had strenuous public careers are too often lacking in any satisfying picture of their home life and family relationships. The present memoir unfortunately, in the absence of any surviving letters or other records, suffers from this defect. In the case of Joseph Sturge, the omission is not at all because his home life was an especially scanty or unhappy portion of his existence. The affectionate intimacy existing between himself and his brothers and sisters has been touched upon near the beginning of this book. And now, at the close, it must not be forgotten that, during the last crowded twelve years of his life, Sturge had at home a tenderly loved wife and a growing family which, for the last five years, numbered four girls and a boy. His fondness for the company of little children was a marked trait in his character. He longed for their trust and sympathy; and they felt the strength of his love. The daughter of one of his Quaker friends still remembers taking part in a country excursion, when Joseph Sturge was looking after the boys from his farm school. Though many of these youngsters were with him, he was able to spare thought for this little girl. Having a vague idea of his public work, she regarded him as being 'like God, since he was able to look after so many big things and so many little things.' His own children too were not at all neglected. He played with them, he arranged little entertainments for them, he bought them pets, including ponies and deer, he took them out for rides on the ponies, he prayed with them and for them. As to his relationship to his wife, it is sufficient to say that she wrote

to his first biographer begging him to bring out clearly what a 'fragrance of blessing' her husband had shed abroad in the household, and declaring that 'the tenderness of his indulgent love can never be set forth in words.'

Mrs. Beecher Stowe in her *Sunny Memories*, the record of her English visit of 1853, has left a detailed picture of the man, as he was in these later years. The authoress of *Uncle Tom* and her husband were met at the Birmingham Railway Station by 'a cheerful, middle-aged gentleman, with a moderate, but not decisive, broad brim to his hat.' His courtesy and attention were unfailing. He even, for the added reason, as he himself admitted, of securing plenty of Anti-slavery talk, conducted the Americans on a four days' carriage tour round Stratford-on-Avon and Kenilworth. After visiting Shakespeare's house, one of the party remarked that the sight-seeing was becoming boring; 'whereat,' writes Mrs. Stowe, 'I thought I saw a sly twinkle round the eyes and mouth of our most Christian and patient friend, who laughingly said he thought it the greatest exercise of Christian tolerance, that he should have trailed round in the mud with us all day in our sight-seeing, and listened to our unreasonable raptures.' The much-lionised authoress dilates upon the peaceful seclusion of the Sturges' house, and of its garden, where the children showed her their pretty pets. 'My Sunday here has always seemed to me a pleasant kind of pastoral, much like the communion of Christian and Faithful on the Delectable Mountains.'

It is now our task to speak of Joseph Sturge's last days, in the record of which we can pick out almost all the main strands, that have before appeared and reappeared in the pattern of his life. He died, as he would have wished, in harness, being spared a closing period of enforced inaction, which would have been as trying an ordeal as any that could have been imposed upon his energetic nature. Just a year before his death, in May, 1858, he was chosen President of the Peace Society. In accepting the post with some diffidence, he spoke of a certain failure of his own strength, but announced his desire to devote a chief part



of his remaining stock of energy to the advocacy of Peace—the more so, as it was an unpopular cause. He felt a special concern to enlist young people, in particular those of his own religious body, in the service of this great principle. Accordingly in March of the following year, with Henry Richard and another friend, he addressed a series of meetings in the north of England, at Leeds, Newcastle, and elsewhere. The Friends' boarding-schools at York, Ackworth, and Rawdon were visited. He seems at this time to have had some clear premonition of his death two months later; he repeatedly, in the course of his earnest pleadings, assured his audience, that, in the near prospect of such an event, no recollection made him happier than the thought, that he had been allowed to do some small services to the cause of Peace. His warnings were well-timed, for, as it turned out, within two or three months the country was overrun by a desperate clamour for war with France—for no apparent reason, except the belief that Louis Napoleon would attack our shores; Gladstone, Cobden, and Bright needed all the support they could get, in order to save a panic-stricken public from rushing into an unnecessary disaster.

Sturge's mind was also occupied, during these closing months, with the care of his Montserrat sugar estate, acquired, as we have seen, in order to show, if possible, that sugar might be more profitably cultivated by the labour of negro peasant proprietors than by that of slaves. The death of his young estate manager about this time gave him an additional concern for the experiment.

The most cheering feature of this winter and spring was the election campaign of his friend John Bright in Birmingham. In this he took an important part. It was he who had been deputed to travel up to Edinburgh, so as to secure Bright's consent to stand. Bright was several times a guest in his house, while making his famous speeches on franchise reform; the last of these visits was within a few weeks of Sturge's death. At the General Election in April, 1859, Birmingham sent back Bright triumphantly to

the House of Commons. Cobden, too, though at the time absent in America, was elected M.P. for Rochdale. The return to popularity and to influence of these two leaders of progressive thought must have brought consolation and hope to the soul of their friend.

Nevertheless, there were dark thunder-clouds hanging over Europe. At the end of April war had broken out between France and Austria; and this war in Italy was destined to be only the beginning of a series of desperate conflicts. Truly it may be said that Joseph Sturge, the peace-maker, was happy in the time of his departing—*felix opportunitate mortis*. How would his heart have been torn by these successive wars, and above all by the horrible struggle in America, in regard to which many of the staunchest of the pacifists forgot, in their indignation against the slave-holder, the principles of their faith!

But it seems that God gave to Joseph Sturge the blessing of an unwonted peace of soul, during these last weeks. Here is the testimony of John Bright, written to Charles Sturge on the day after the end came:—

‘From the conversation I had with thee, I think on thy last visit, thou wilt know that I thought the end not very far off. There was a gentleness and a quietness of manner which seemed like a drawing away from the world, and a beauty of goodness upon the countenance, which seemed lit up with rays from above even whilst still dwelling below. This day three weeks, I think, I was at your meeting, and my eye rested many times upon the countenance of thy brother. I thought of the holy serenity there must be within, if the outward expression were any test of what was passing in the soul. I believe it was an accurate test, and that, his life’s work ended, he did but wait for his great reward.’

On May 8th he paid his accustomed early Sunday morning visit to the Severn Street Adult School. It was remarked that the time of silence, after the address had been given, was longer and more intense than was customary. Two days afterwards he was up in London speaking for the Voluntary Schools Association, and taking part in the arrangements for the annual meeting of the Peace Society



in the following week. On Friday, May 13th, he appeared as well as usual, though his heart had been giving him trouble for some time. One of the Cadbury family met him that morning, before breakfast, riding on a pony in Edgbaston. 'John,' said Joseph Sturge, 'I understand that thou hast had much to do with placing stone drinking-troughs for horses and dogs, and I want to talk to thee about putting one up at the Five Ways.'<sup>1</sup> The next morning he rose again about six o'clock, and, after his usual time of prayer, called his little daughters to accompany his ride on their ponies. A fit of coughing came on, followed by a severe heart attack. Before many minutes had passed, the spirit had left the body that had served it so well.

There is a story, which sounds authentic, that Joseph Sturge once told some one, when paying a visit to the big City Cemetery, that he was considering whether it would not be better for his remains to be buried among the nameless green mounds of the working people, whom he loved, rather than in the Friends' graveyard, in accordance with the practice of his Society. It was, however, under the shadow of the Quaker meeting-house that his body was laid to rest. The funeral took place on a day of pouring rain. Nevertheless it is said that the two miles of streets traversed were lined on either side by crowds of people, while nearly all the tradesmen along the route put up their shutters and suspended business for the time. It was a striking tribute to the power of his character; but, from his invisible home, we seem to hear his ardent spirit sighing because more of those, who honoured him thus, were not clinging to the great truths which he had tried, however imperfectly, to express.

'What we want is *light*,' Mrs. Browning had written in 1848, 'God's light organised in some high soul'; and these

<sup>1</sup> This was the spot chosen subsequently for the erection by a grateful Birmingham of the existing statue of Sturge, with its drinking trough and fountains, and its supporting figures of Charity and Peace.



words may be used to describe the impression left by Joseph Sturge's personality upon many of his contemporaries, though his intellectual equipment was insufficient to allow of his ranking as a prophet, or teacher, of the race. 'It seems to be the will of Him, who is infinite in Wisdom,' he wrote to one of his friends, (in words that have been more than once quoted of late years), 'that light upon great subjects should first arise, and be gradually spread, through the faithfulness of individuals in acting up to their own convictions.' It was just his faithfulness in spreading light, as regards the sinfulness of all war, as regards the need of rendering justice to the American negro and to the British worker, that constitutes his greatest service to his generation and to our own.

Joseph Sturge was endowed by Nature with unusual powers of mind and body. And it was a very definite religious faith that directed those powers, in spite of many cramping features of his environment and upbringing, into the channels in which they were so fruitfully exercised. The most important characteristic of his faith was, what has been well called 'the practice of the presence of God.' As a Quaker he believed that it was possible to get the best available guidance and strength, for all the various tasks and conflicts of life, by the silent communion of the heart with the universal Spirit of Love and Wisdom; not so much through verbal prayer, but through the quiet waiting for the voice of God speaking to the soul. To do this was his daily habit, both in the early morning and at other times, particularly in seasons of excitement and stress. He spoke but little of this side of his life; but those who knew him best could trace a direct connection between this practice of inward retirement and his great qualities in active life—his serene cheerfulness, his unyielding determination, his forgetfulness of self. And, though not ostentatious in his religion, he was in no way ashamed of it. It was the custom in his household for some verses of the Bible to be read before breakfast, followed by a solemn pause for meditation and prayer. Many of the guests who

came to his hospitable house were probably quite strangers to religious exercises; but the practice was never omitted, and its earnest simplicity appeared to give no offence. So too there was a striking naturalness in the way he constantly introduced outspoken references to Jesus Christ and His teachings into his political speeches and other pronouncements. In spite of the discordant nature of his trading business in some of its aspects, there was so much more moral unity in his life, so much less divorce between preaching and practice, than there is in the lives of the vast majority of professing Christians. His politics and his religion were one, and men felt the genuineness of both.

Throughout his life Sturge set a high value upon the special characteristics of the Quaker interpretation of Christianity, its testimony to the spiritual simplicity of religion and its rejection of all means, such as war and political intrigue, that are at variance with the ends which the Christian seeks to achieve. Yet he was always ready to co-operate with men of every and of no denomination, whose means and ends conformed to the truly Christian standard. He had no idea of making converts to the practices of the Society of Friends. Indeed it was a pity that he did not use his influence more in the direction of making known to others the great blessings, which flow from the custom of united worship upon the basis of silence and of a free ministry. Probably he was too engrossed in his tasks of practical righteousness, and was too humble, too sensible of his own spiritual failings, to feel free to act as a guide to others in religion.

The consciousness of his own sins, of the comparative coldness and faithlessness of his heart, was one of the most marked and most puzzling features of his religious life, at any rate as it is expressed in the few letters and other written records, which reveal his personal feelings. 'God be merciful unto me a sinner' seems to have been his most frequent and appropriate prayer. This excessive humility and self-reproach (as it may seem to us) was combined with a constant insistence on the nearness of death and of



the tribunal of divine judgment, at which our future happiness would depend partly upon the extent of our love and services to our fellow-men, and partly upon our faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ—'in the boundless mercy of a crucified Redeemer.' The stress he laid upon this doctrine of the atonement (insisted upon by the Evangelicals of his day) is testified by numerous witnesses as well as by his own letters. The following passage from a letter written to a Demerara missionary, within a few months of his death, can be almost exactly paralleled by confessions of faith in other letters that go back as far as 1834:—

'I wish I could more fully realise my personal interest in a Saviour's atoning sacrifice; and had a more lively faith to realise the things that are unseen and eternal.

'Sometimes I seem to have little more to rest upon than a deep sense of the depravity of my own heart, and my immeasurable distance from the Christian standard, which is the perfect pattern held up to us.

'It is better to feel and to know this, than to suppose that we have a single rag of our own righteousness to trust to, if it does not cast us down below hope; and this it need not, for we know the mission of Christ was not to save the righteous, but sinners; and that none are so low as to be beyond the reach of His mercy, who is as boundless in love as He is in power.'

The 'evangelical' conception of Christ's atonement, however faulty its intellectual expression may be, has, or at any rate should have, two invaluable fruits. It binds the heart to God in supremely humble and grateful dependence upon His Love; and it brings men into touch with the personality of Jesus and His unique revelation of the moral character of God. But the dogma has also had, as a matter of history, two baneful results. Its insistence upon 'justification by faith' has often led to a neglect of the practice of justice and mercy towards our fellow-men; and it has been too often combined with a denial to all, who are without this one religious experience, of the hope of future happiness, or of what is usually called Heaven. Joseph Sturge's faith in the Atonement seems to have



secured him a large measure of the blessings which we have mentioned, while he was happily preserved from the hypocrisy and exclusiveness which so often accompanied the doctrine. He doubtless fully believed that *his own* salvation depended on his 'personal interest' in the death of Christ. Yet he certainly did not deny the prospect of Heaven to those who knew nothing of this doctrine. It is noticeable, for example, how, in his letters to Cobden, though he perhaps dwells somewhat unnecessarily upon our *future* happiness, yet he makes that happiness dependent simply upon such practical considerations as 'having advocated the cause of the defenceless, and condemned oppression and murder in high places.' He was, we know, often mystified and discouraged by the way in which good Evangelicals disobeyed the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, while men of much less orthodox views upheld them far more consistently. His Christian insight was better than the logic of his creed; and, in truth, his wide charity of heart and his supreme reverence for justice and mercy leads us to class his religious faith far more with that of his two most congenial friends Cobden and Whittier (both of whom were far from being dogmatic in their Christianity) than with Evangelicals like Joseph John Gurney or William Forster. His spiritual life was indeed nourished by his reading of the Bible; and it is significant that the allusions to the Scriptures, which we find in his letters and speeches, are almost entirely taken from the New Testament, the dispensation of Love; while the same ethical tendency in his character was revealed by the much noticed fact that his favourite chapters, selected again and again for reading at Adult School and elsewhere, were the thirteenth of First Corinthians and the twelfth of Romans—the last named was even known as 'Mr. Sturge's chapter.'

It is surprising, and also distressing, that in none of his extant letters or journals does Joseph Sturge allude to any personal experience of inward 'peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,'—to any sense of uninterrupted communion with

God. He dwells instead, as we have mentioned, upon the constant coldness and unworthiness of his heart. And what is most remarkable—that is, if his own estimate of his inward unhappiness is to be trusted, is, that we have many witnesses of the extraordinary impression of an unfailingly cheerful serenity of soul, which he left, at any rate in his later years, upon those who associated with him. We have already in the present chapter quoted John Bright's testimony on this point. Six years earlier Henry Richard wrote in his diary, 'It is always a comfort and an encouragement to see Joseph Sturge's face, ever so full of benignity and hopefulness . . . It is always a cordial to meet him, he is so full of gentleness, courage, hope.' And other men and women felt just the same.

How this sunny cheerfulness of manner could be combined with an almost unlimited capacity for self-reproach is a psychological problem which we cannot completely solve. It must be remembered that to be 'poor in spirit'—to be ever striving to overcome admitted failures—is the surest road to the Kingdom of Heaven. We are, however, inclined to think that, in Joseph Sturge's circle, the habit of minute introspection was inculcated to an unnecessary and harmful degree, and that the good man was by it deprived of much inward joy that God meant him to have in his hours of solitude. In company, the natural Christian joyousness of his warm heart reasserted itself, with the happiest results upon the temperaments of others.

Sturge was a man of few books. After the Bible his most valued book in the latter years of his life was T. C. Upham's *Interior Life of Faith and Love*. The writer of this book, an American professor, is best known as the biographer of Madame Guyon; and the *Interior Life* is deeply imbued with the spirit of the Quietist Saint. This book was well calculated to nourish the best instincts of Sturge's Quaker soul; but it unfortunately laid down too absolute a 'perfectionist' doctrine, that is, it taught him that the true disciple stands condemned, if he does not live in such complete unity with Christ, as to be free from 'voluntary indulgence in

any known sin.' This was, as is well known, the teaching of George Fox and John Wesley. Sturge had acquired the tenderest of consciences for the detection of his own slightest errors of temper or of judgment; and he could not, for a moment, imagine that he had attained to the habitually sinless state which Upham describes. Here perhaps we have a partial explanation of the exaggerated discouragement and self-depreciation, from which he appears to have suffered throughout most of his life. Yet we, who are privileged to believe more in salvation by joy, must beware of carelessly blurring over the constant errors which only a trained and educated conscience can detect and remedy.

The intense seriousness of Sturge's life was tempered by various considerations that we have already incidentally noticed. It is true that his upbringing cut him off from the enjoyment of art or music. But his love of rural scenery, of his garden, and of open-air life, his affection for children and animals kept a wholesome balance to his moral earnestness. He could tell a good tale, and he enjoyed vastly the playfulness of his child friends.

In person Joseph Sturge was square and strongly built, somewhat below middle size. We have already dwelt upon his superabundant vitality and energy. This and his strength of will were very clearly marked in his face, particularly in the lips, chin, and the overhanging, bushy eyebrows. An American friend once wrote, when comparing his portrait with that of a General, 'What a mercy *you* are not a General! otherwise, with your energy, who can tell what mischief you would do in the world?' Cobden said, after Sturge's death, that he was equal in energy to any three men he had ever known. One of his greatest gifts was his wonderful power of passing rapidly from one subject to another, while concentrating his mind upon each, as if that particular subject were the most important thing in the whole world. This intensity of will and purpose was however combined with certain intellectual limitations, which often prevented him from even considering argu-



ments urged against the uncompromising policy, which it was his habit to advocate. His fine qualities had their drawbacks. He would attack an abuse vehemently and even tactlessly; and though sometimes his very vehemence overcame apparently insuperable obstacles, at other times a somewhat gentler approach would have served his purpose better. In the earlier part of his public career, at any rate, he could at times be justly charged with a dogmatic wilfulness of mind. Thus he was represented to Francis Place in 1841 (in regard to his anti-corn-law opinions) as 'a positive, obdurate man, who could not be induced to reconsider any subject, but was apt to reply that "it was not consonant to the light within him."' It is true that Place found this description an exaggerated one; but something of the same characteristic is indicated, for instance, in a letter which Cobden wrote to him in 1849, rebuking him for being 'the most fidgety man I know,' because of his persistent attempts, in season and out of season, to quicken Cobden's pace in promoting international peace. One of the young Friends who had become, early in the fifties, a teacher in the Severn Street Adult School, and who revered him as an inspired leader, nevertheless recollected him long afterwards as having an obstinate determination, which would have been 'intolerable, if he had not been such a good man.'

A kindred fault, with which he had to struggle throughout his life, was a tendency to lose his temper. The 'peppery' disposition, which he had imputed to himself in his school days, when he had his own personal battles to fight out, still to some extent clung to him, when he was engrossed in his labours for the cause of the oppressed. Probably he often walked about in a state of fiery indignation against the callous injustice and the moral blindness of the professing Christians and governing classes of his day. And we are told that there were times when he was betrayed into hasty and passionate expressions of this indignation, by way of personal rebuke of others, who seemed to him at fault.

Henry Richard, in his *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge*, while candidly mentioning these defects, also gives evidence of the marvellous manner in which, through constant moral perseverance, Sturge towards the close of his life obtained mastery over these very natural infirmities of a noble character. The ungracious positiveness of early days, he says, had then mellowed down to a most childlike tractableness, on occasions where the speaker had his confidence and no question of bed-rock principle was involved. So too with his quick temper. In the last decade of his life, apart from very temporary lapses, his imperturbable calmness and gentleness, in every kind of difficulty, was the one characteristic which struck his friends perhaps most forcibly of all. A niece, who was governess to his children and saw him constantly during the last seven years of his life, could only remember one instance, in which he showed evidence of being angry. In his home, as in the outside world, peace and goodwill were shed around his footsteps, for all who had open hearts to profit thereby. His life, with its faults, of which he was only too conscious, was a splendid example not so much of unaided self-mastery as of the capacity to draw consciously from the fountains of Divine Power and Love, which are always ready to overflow the hearts of those, who have made the great discovery of their existence.

We will not attempt any further delineation of Joseph Sturge's personality—a rare and attractive personality, which we hope the foregoing pages will in some measure have endowed with life in the imagination of those who read them. The poem which Whittier wrote shortly after his death, as a tribute to his friend, forms an appropriate conclusion to this memoir. It is slightly marred by want of familiarity with the topography of Birmingham, and the allusion in the opening verses to the recent death of the tyrannical Ferdinand of Naples has lost its interest to-day. Nevertheless, many of the verses breathe the genuine spirit of poetry, and express with beauty and with faithfulness the outstanding features of Joseph Sturge's character.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the fair land o'erwatched by Ischia's mountains,  
Across the charmèd bay  
Whose blue waves keep with Capri's silver fountains  
Perpetual holiday,

A King lies dead, his wafer duly eaten,  
His gold-bought masses given;  
And Rome's great altar smokes with gums to sweeten  
Her foulest gift to heaven.

And while all Naples thrills with mute thanksgiving,  
The court of England's Queen  
For the dead monster, so abhorred while living,  
In mourning garb is seen.

With a true sorrow God rebukes that feigning;  
By lone Edgbaston's side  
Stands a great city in the sky's sad raining,  
Bare headed and wet eyed!

Silent for once the restless hive of labour,  
Save the low funeral tread,  
Or voice of craftsman whispering to his neighbour  
The good deeds of the dead.

For him no minster's chant of the immortals  
Rose from the lips of sin,  
No mitred priest swung back the heavenly portals  
To let the white soul in.

But Age and Sickness framed their tearful faces  
In the low hovel's door,  
And prayers went up from all the dark by-places  
And Ghettos of the poor.

The pallid toiler and the negro chattel,  
The vagrant of the street,  
The human dice wherewith in games of battle  
The lords of earth compete,



Touched with a grief that needs no outward draping,  
All swelled the long lament  
Of grateful hearts, instead of marble, shaping  
His viewless monument!

For never yet, with ritual pomp and splendour,  
In the long heretofore,  
A heart more loyal, warm, and true, and tender  
Has England's turf closed o'er.

And if there fell from out her grand old steeples  
No crash of brazen wail,  
The murmurous woe of kindreds, tongues, and peoples  
Swept in on every gale.

It came from Holstein's birchen-belted meadows,  
And from the tropic calms  
Of Indian islands in the sun-smit shadows  
Of occidental palms;

From the locked roadsteads of the Bothnian peasants  
And harbours of the Finn,  
Where war's worn victims saw his gentle presence  
Come sailing, Christ-like, in,

To seek the lost, to build the old waste places,  
To link the hostile shores  
Of severing seas, and sow with England's daisies  
The moss of Finland's moors.

Thanks for the good man's beautiful example,  
Who in the vilest saw  
Some sacred crypt or altar of a temple  
Still vocal with God's law;

And heard with tender ear the spirit sighing  
As from its prison cell,  
Praying for pity, like the mournful crying  
Of Jonah out of hell.

Not his the golden pen's or lip's persuasion,  
But a fine sense of right,  
And Truth's directness, meeting each occasion  
Straight as a line of light.

His faith and works, like streams that intermingle,  
 In the same channel ran;  
 The crystal clearness of an eye kept single  
 Shamed all the frauds of man.

The very gentlest of all human natures  
 He joined to courage strong,  
 And love outreaching unto all God's creatures  
 With sturdy hate of wrong.

Tender as woman, manliness and meekness  
 In him were so allied  
 That they who judged him by his strength or weakness  
 Saw but a single side.

Men failed, betrayed him; but his zeal seemed nourished  
 By failure and by fall;  
 Still larger faith in human kind he cherished,  
 And in God's love for all.

And now he rests; his greatness and his sweetness  
 No more shall seem at strife;  
 And death has moulded into calm completeness  
 The statue of his life.

Where the dews glisten and the song-birds warble,  
 His dust to dust is laid,  
 In Nature's keeping, with no pomp of marble  
 To shame his modest shade.

The forges glow, the hammers all are ringing;  
 Beneath its smoky veil,  
 Hard by, the city of his love is swinging  
 Its clamorous iron flail.

But round his grave are quietude and beauty,  
 And the sweet heaven above,—  
 The fitting symbol of a life of duty  
 Transfigured into love!







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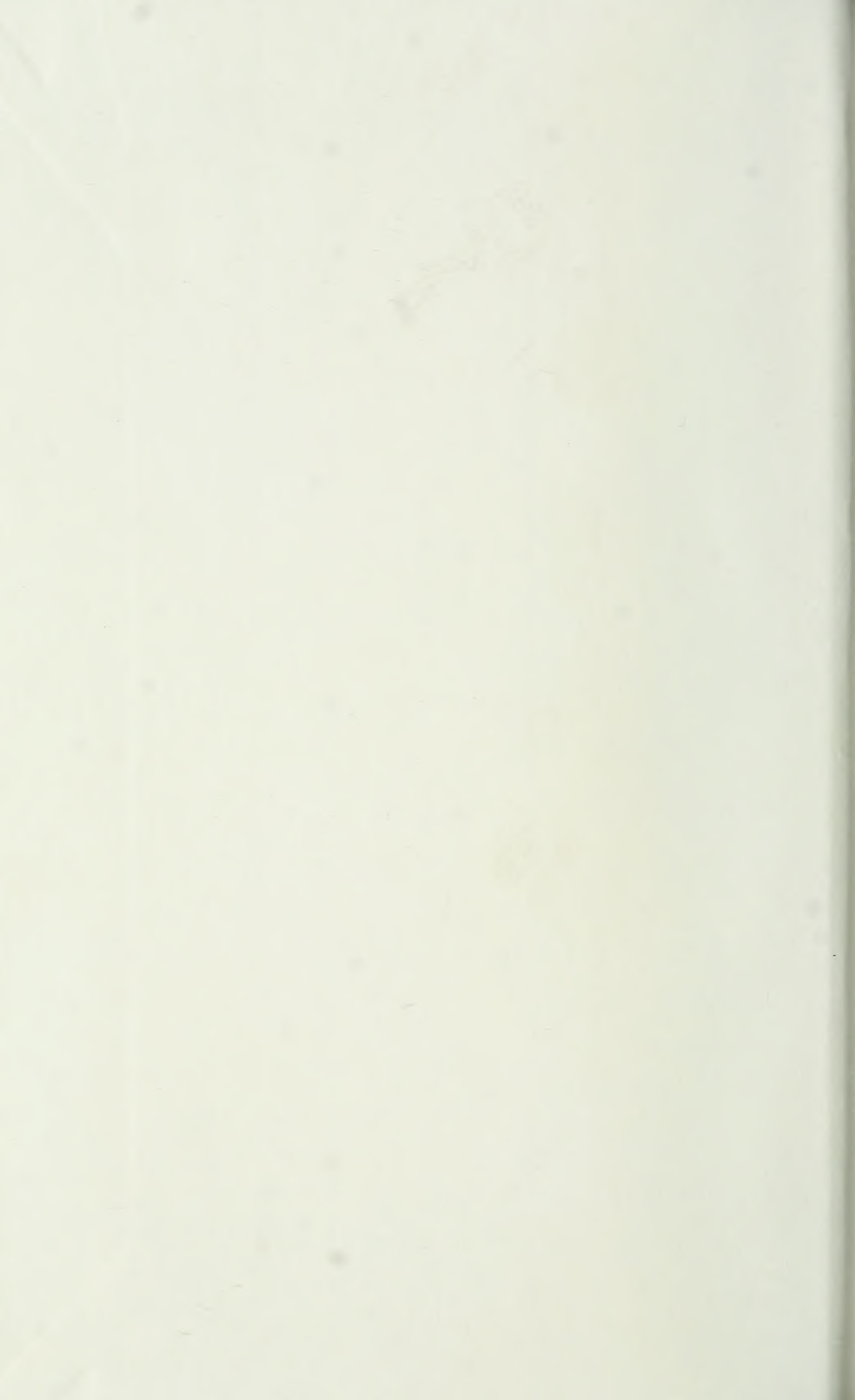
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